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BROKEN WINGS



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FIVE STAR WEEKLY

BROKEN WINGS



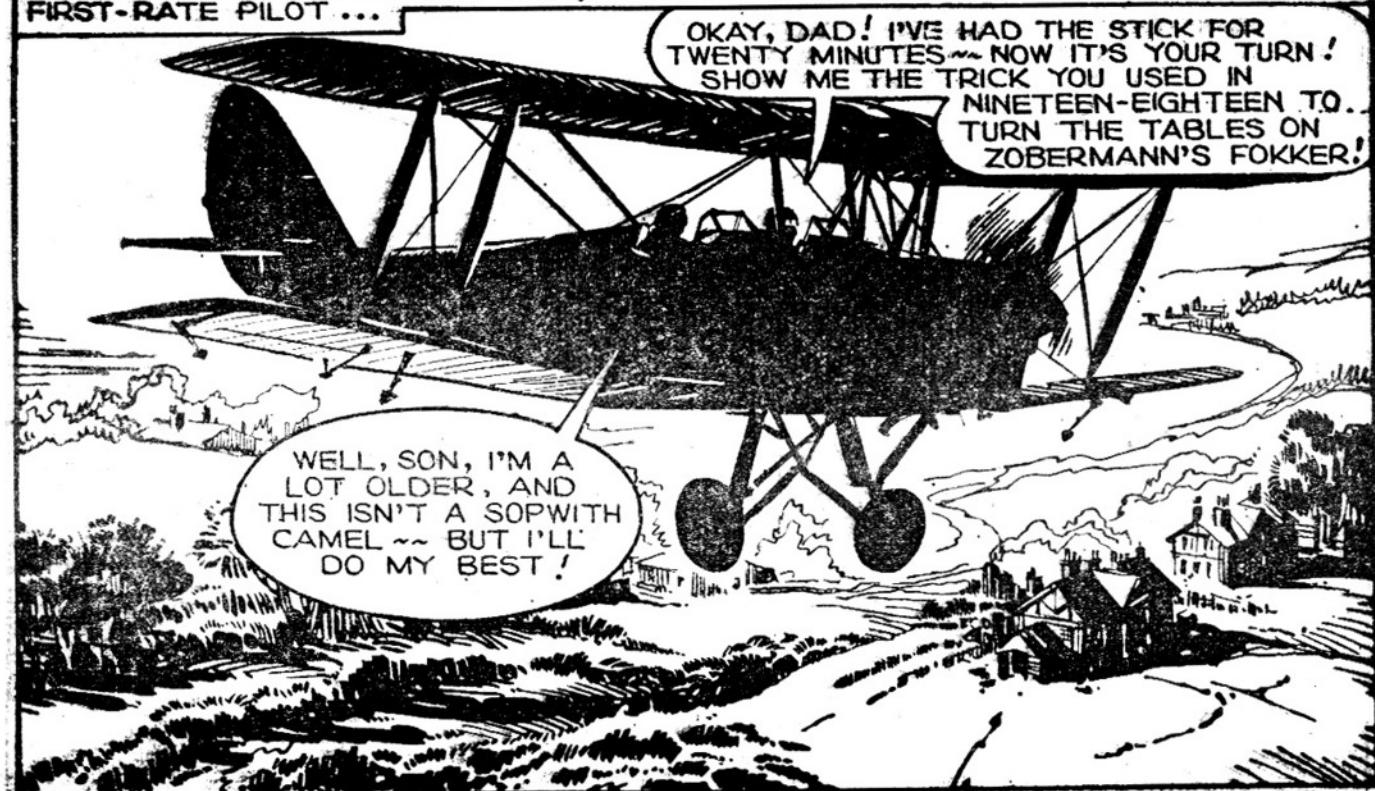
IN THE AIR WAR THAT SWEPT ACROSS EUROPE WITH TERRIFYING FURY FROM 1940 UNTIL 1945, THERE WERE DRAMAS AND ACTS OF HEROISM THAT WILL NEVER BE TOLD BECAUSE THE ONLY MEN WHO COULD TELL THEM HAVE PAID THE FINAL PRICE. THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE MAN WHO BLAZED A TRAIL ACROSS ENEMY SKIES LIKE A METEOR. IT IS ALSO THE STORY OF MANY MEN -- THOSE WHO FLEW, AND LIVED, AND DIED AT HIS SIDE ...

Chapter 1. PICK YOUR TARGET

THE SHADOW OF THE COMING WAR HAD FALLEN ACROSS EUROPE IN AUGUST, 1939. IN GREAT BRITAIN, IT WAS A TIME OF GRIM PREPARATION FOR THE COMING CONFLICT. WHAT WAS MOST FEARED WAS THE WAR THAT MIGHT STRIKE FROM THE AIR ...



IT WAS AT THE END OF THAT FATEFUL AUGUST THAT DONALD FLEMING FLEW FROM A SMALL PRIVATE AERODROME IN KENT WITH HIS FATHER, A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN. IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR FLEMING'S FATHER HAD BEEN A FIGHTER PILOT AND HIS LOVE OF FLYING HAD STAYED WITH HIM FOR TWENTY YEARS. HE OWNED HIS OWN TIGER MOTH ~ AND AS SOON AS HIS SON WAS OLD ENOUGH, HE HAD TAUGHT HIM HOW TO FLY. NOW DONALD FLEMING, AT NINETEEN, WAS A FIRST-RATE PILOT ...

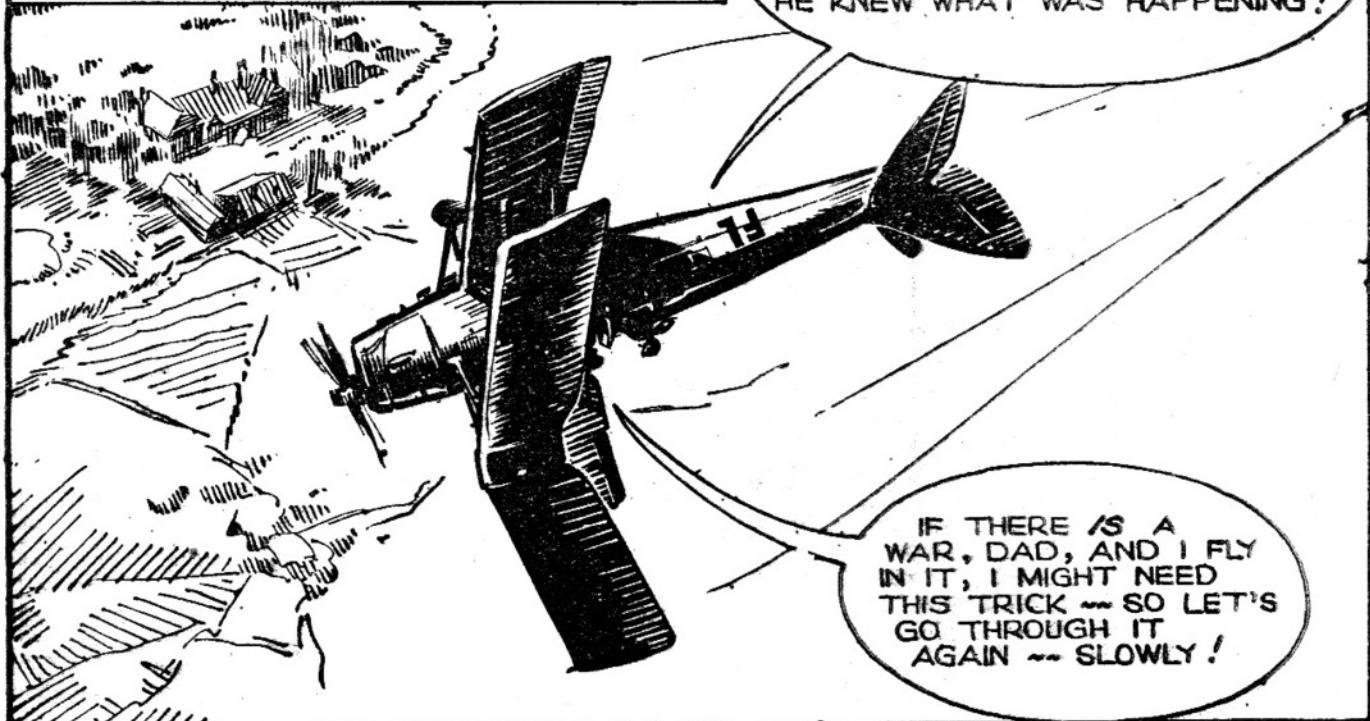


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SKILFULLY, FLEMING'S FATHER PULLED THE LITTLE AIRCRAFT UP INTO A TIGHT LOOP-- AND AS THE GRAVITY PETROL FEED FROM THE WING TANK SUDDENLY CUT OUT, HE ROLLED, AND CAME OUT OF THE LOOP AT A SURPRISING ANGLE ...

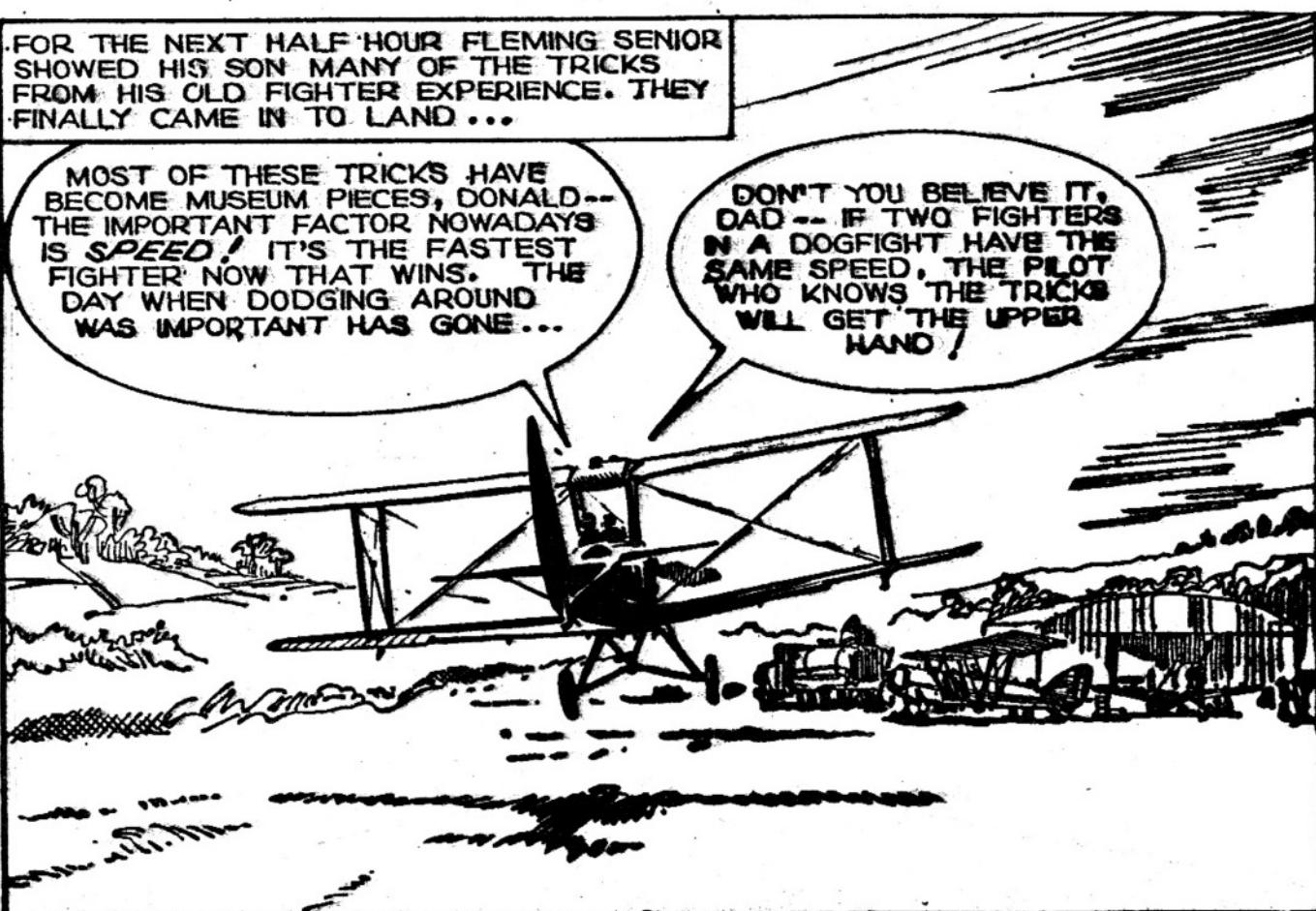
THE CAMEL HAD A ROTARY ENGINE, SON, WITH FUEL PUMPS AND A POWERFUL TORQUE -- I ROLLED OUT OF THE LOOP WITH A BURST OF SPEED THAT PUT ME ON TO ZOBERMANN'S TAIL BEFORE HE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING!



FOR THE NEXT HALF HOUR FLEMING SENIOR SHOWED HIS SON MANY OF THE TRICKS FROM HIS OLD FIGHTER EXPERIENCE. THEY FINALLY CAME IN TO LAND ...

MOST OF THESE TRICKS HAVE BECOME MUSEUM PIECES, DONALD-- THE IMPORTANT FACTOR NOWADAYS IS SPEED! IT'S THE FASTEST FIGHTER NOW THAT WINS. THE DAY WHEN DODGING AROUND WAS IMPORTANT HAS GONE ...

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT, DAD -- IF TWO FIGHTERS IN A DOGFIGHT HAVE THE SAME SPEED, THE PILOT WHO KNOWS THE TRICKS WILL GET THE UPPER HAND!



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FLEMING SENIOR WAS DUE IN BIRMINGHAM FOR A BUSINESS CONFERENCE ~ SO, AS SOON AS HE HAD CHANGED OUT OF HIS FLYING KIT, HE TOOK HIS LEAVE ...

WELL, DON, I'M OFF! I ENJOYED THAT FLIP ~ I WISH I HAD MORE TIME THESE DAYS TO KEEP MY HAND IN!

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, DAD! WHENEVER I THINK I'M AN EXPERIENCED PILOT, I JUST HAVE TO TAKE A FLIGHT WITH YOU TO REALISE THAT YOU'VE FORGOTTEN MORE ABOUT FLYING THAN I EVER LEARNED!



AFTER HIS FATHER HAD GONE, FLEMING PRACTISED THE OLD-TIME FIGHTER TACTICS OVER AND OVER AGAIN. IT WAS DUSK WHEN HE FINALLY SET OUT FOR LONDON ...

EVER SINCE I WAS A KID I'VE ADMIRIED THE OLD MAN FOR BEING THE **MAN** THAT HE IS ~~ AND NOW THAT I CAN HANDLE A PLANE, I'M GETTING SOME IDEA OF HIS SKILL. HE CHUCKED THAT MOTH AROUND TODAY AS IF IT WERE A TOY! SOME DAY I'M GOING TO SHOW HIM THAT HIS SON CAN COME UP TO HIS STANDARDS ~~ I'M REALLY GOING TO WORK AT FLYING FROM NOW ON ...



DONALD FLEMING'S "WORK" AT FLYING WAS TO BEGIN SOONER THAN HE THOUGHT. A WEEK AFTER HIS VISIT TO KENT, THE MIGHT OF THE WEHRMACHT WAS UNLEASHED AGAINST POLAND -- AND THE NEWS THAT BROKE UPON BRITAIN ON THE MORNING OF 3RD SEPTEMBER, 1939, WAS **WAR** ...

THIS IS IT, GUV! IT'S BACK TO THE TRENCHES AGAIN FOR THE OLD BRIGADE.

I CAN'T IMAGINE FLEET STREET WITHOUT YOU, HARRY -- YOU'D BETTER GET AN EXEMPTION!

NO, OLD-TIMER -- THIS WAR IS GOING TO BE FOUGHT IN THE **AIR** ... AND IT'S GOING TO COME A GOOD DEAL NEARER HOME THAN FLANDERS! IT'S MEN LIKE ME THEY'LL BE SHOUTING FOR THIS TIME -- AND I'M NOT GOING TO WAIT FOR THEM TO SHOUT...

THAT SAME MORNING, FLEMING WENT TO THE AIR MINISTRY AND VOLUNTEERED AS A FIGHTER PILOT ...

BELIEVE ME, FLEMING, WE'RE GOING TO NEED EVERY SKILLED PILOT WE CAN GET! IF THE LUFTWAFFE ATTACK LONDON IN FULL STRENGTH, OUR FIGHTER SQUADRONS WILL HAVE A GRIM JOB ON THEIR HANDS!

I'VE BEEN FLYING A MOTH FOR TWO YEARS, SIR. I'D LIKE TO GET ON TO FIGHTERS, ! RIGHT AWAY!

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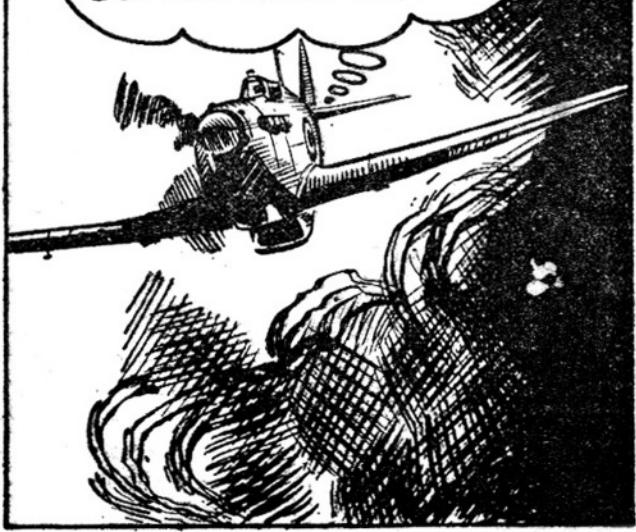
RED TAPE WAS CUT TO A MINIMUM --
AND IN TWO WEEKS, FLEMING WAS POSTED
TO A FIGHTER SQUADRON EQUIPPED
WITH THE NEW HAWKER HURRICANES.

YOU SEEMED QUITE A GEN
LAD ON THE TWO-SEATER,
TRAINER, FLEMING -- SO
WE'RE GOING TO TRUST YOU!
THERE'S YOUR HURRICANE!
SHE'S WORTH HER
WEIGHT IN GOLD TO US!
PRANG HER --
AND YOU NEEDN'T
COME BACK...

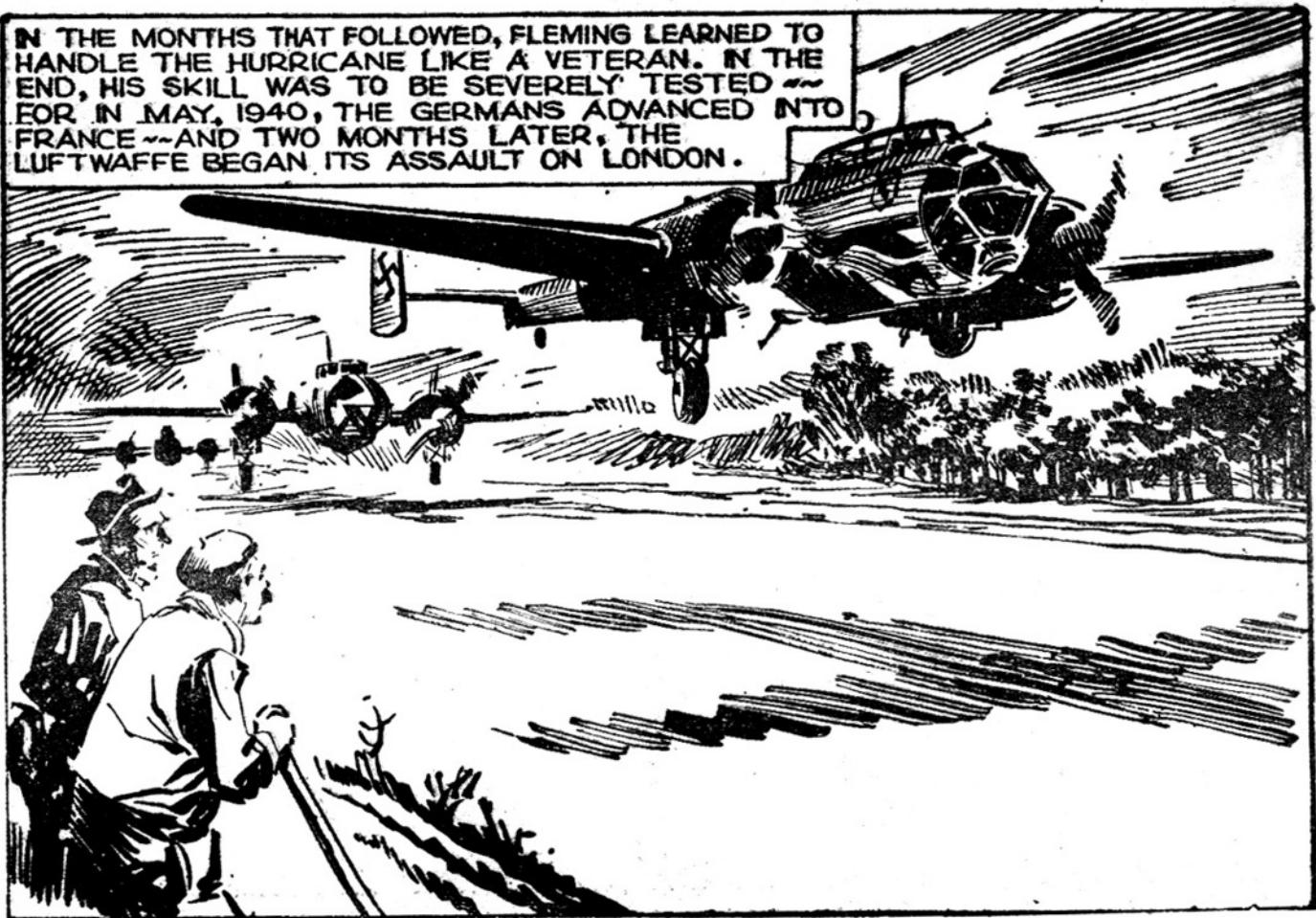


10,000 FEET ABOVE BERKSHIRE,
FLEMING PUT THE HURRICANE
THROUGH ITS PACES ...

WHAT A MACHINE--
THREE-THIRTY MILES AN
HOUR FLAT OUT -- AND
TWELVE HUNDRED HORSEPOWER
UNDER THE BONNET! SHE'S
ALMOST 700 SENSITIVE ON
THE CONTROLS -- THIS IS
GOING TO TAKE SOME
GETTING USED TO...



IN THE MONTHS THAT FOLLOWED, FLEMING LEARNED TO
HANDLE THE HURRICANE LIKE A VETERAN. IN THE
END, HIS SKILL WAS TO BE SEVERELY TESTED --
FOR IN MAY, 1940, THE GERMANS ADVANCED INTO
FRANCE -- AND TWO MONTHS LATER, THE
LUFTWAFFE BEGAN ITS ASSAULT ON LONDON.



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FLEMING'S HURRICANE SQUADRON WAS ONE OF MANY THAT WERE WAITING FOR THE SIGNAL ...

HIGH TIME,
TOO!

SCRAMBLE!
STRONG BANDIT
FORMATION APPROACHING
IN SECTOR SIX AT
ANGELS TEN ~
SCRAMBLE!

THESE DECK-
CHAIRS ARE BAD
FOR THE SPINE!

IN TWO MINUTES THE HURRICANE SQUADRON WAS STREAKING UP THROUGH THE CLEAR MORNING AIR. HIGH IN THE SUMMER SKY, IT BANKED IN FORMATION, AND THUNDERED TOWARDS THE EAST ...

RED LEADER
CALLING...TEST.
YOUR GUNS !
OVER.

RED CHARLIE
TESTING...CHECK!

RED ABLE...
OKAY THIS
END !

SWEEEPING OVER LONDON AT 14,000 FEET, FLEMING SUDDENLY SAW THE MASS FORMATION OF GERMAN BOMBERS MOVING IN FROM THE SEA.

RED
CHARLIE TO
RED LEADER...
GET A LOAD
OF WHAT
WE'RE UP
AGAINST!
EIGHTY
BOMBERS AT
LEAST...

WE'RE BEING JOINED
BY A SQUADRON OF
SPITS, RED CHARLIE.
DOES THAT MAKE
YOU HAPPIER ABOUT
THE ODDS ?



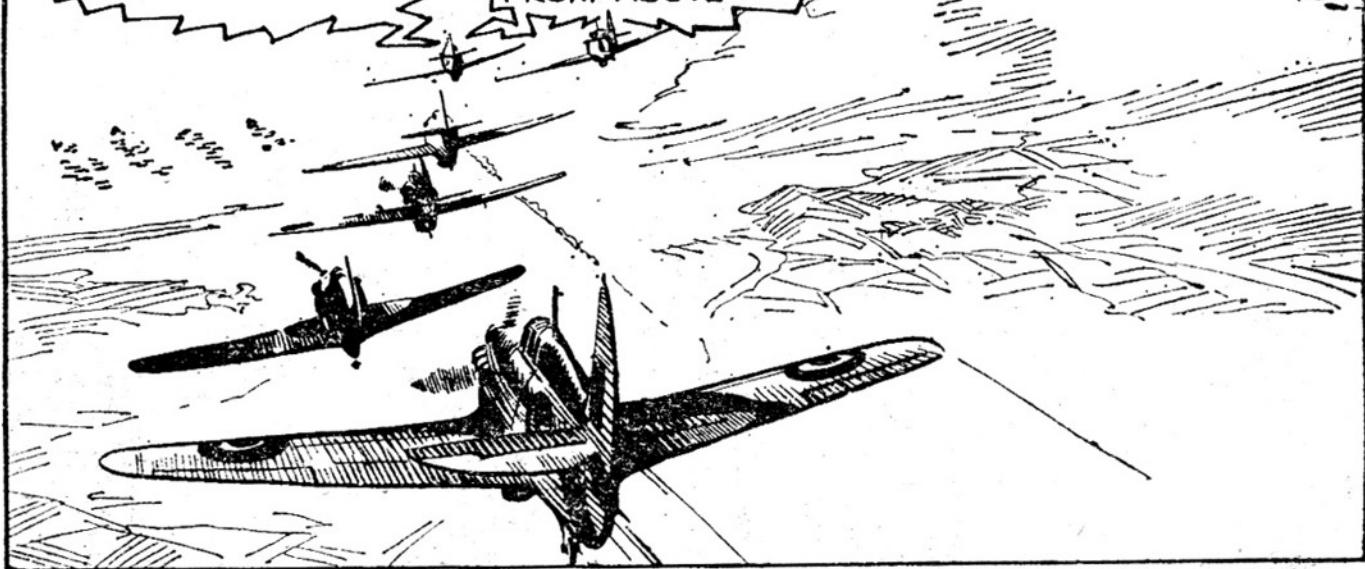
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AS THE HURRICANES HOMED IN ON THE ENEMY,
THEY SPLIT INTO TWO FORMATIONS ~~ AND
CRISP INSTRUCTIONS CRACKLED ON THE R.T.

YELLOW LEADER.
TO RED LEADER.
JUST AS YOU SAY.
AND GOOD
HUNTING!

OKAY, CONTROL ~~
WE SEE THE 'BANDITS' ~~
IF THEY DEVELOP
FIGHTER COVER, KEEP
US POSTED ~~ OVER!

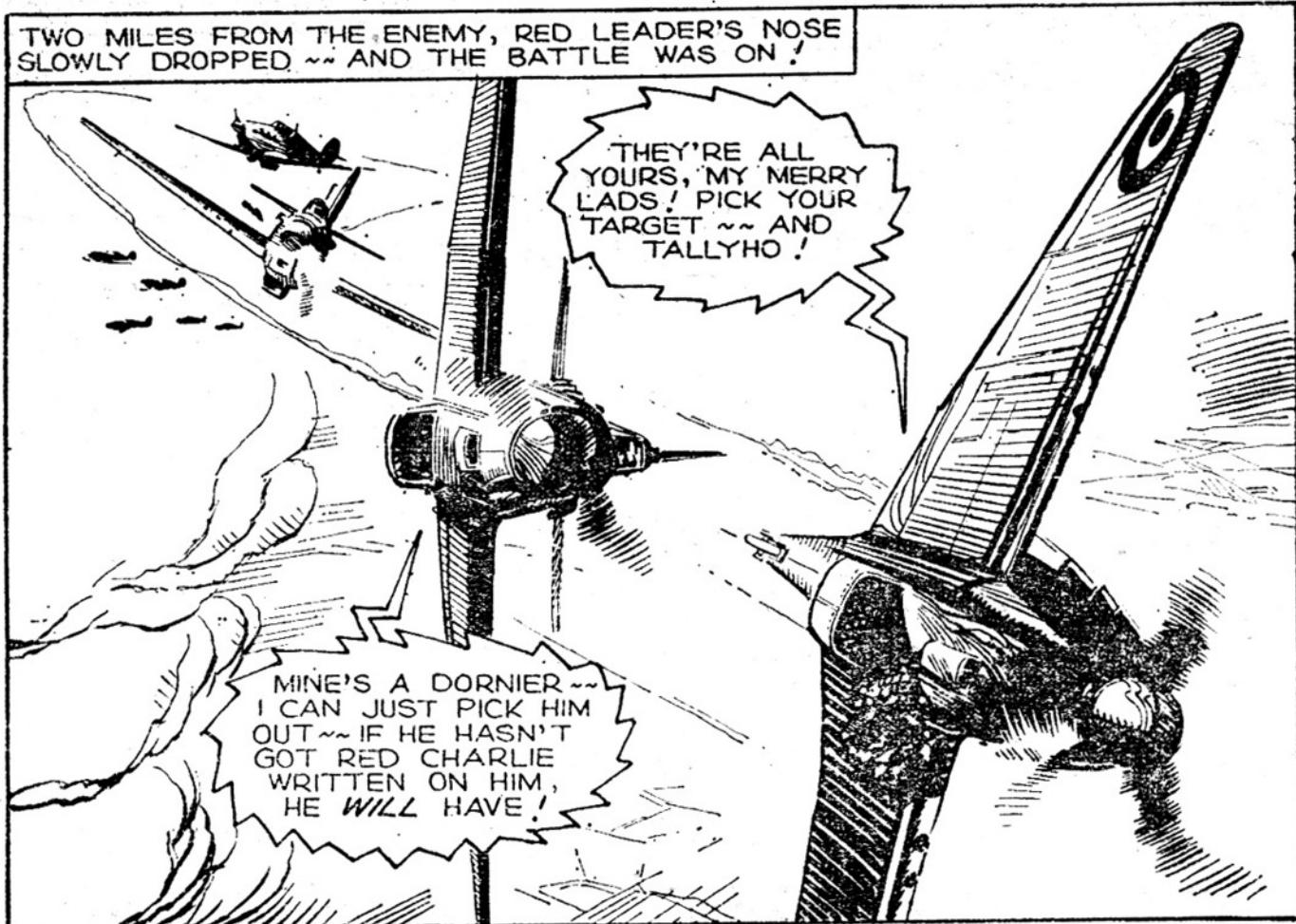
RED LEADER TO
YELLOW LEADER ~~
GET UPSTAIRS TO
ANGELS EIGHTEEN
AND TAKE THEM
FROM ABOVE.



TWO MILES FROM THE ENEMY, RED LEADER'S NOSE
SLOWLY DROPPED ~~ AND THE BATTLE WAS ON !

THEY'RE ALL
YOURS, MY MERRY
LADS ! PICK YOUR
TARGET ~~ AND
TALLYHO !

MINE'S A DORNIER ~~
I CAN JUST PICK HIM
OUT ~~ IF HE HASN'T
GOT RED CHARLIE
WRITTEN ON HIM,
HE WILL HAVE !

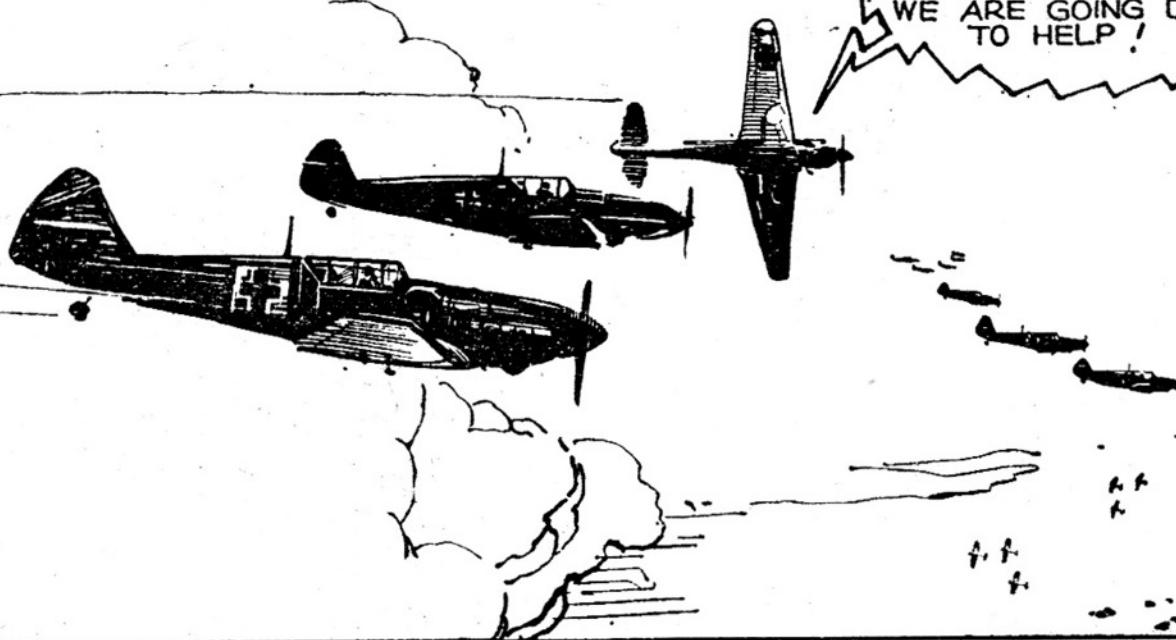


THE SUDDEN RAGE OF BATTLE IN HIM, FLEMING HURTLED TO THE ATTACK, HIS GLOVED THUMB POISED ON THE FIRING BUTTON ... AND AS THE BOMBER LOOMED IN HIS SIGHTS, HE COUNTED THE SECONDS ...



AND SO FLEMING WENT IN FOR HIS FIRST KILL. BUT HIGH ABOVE THE MELEE, AT 18,000 FEET, AN UMBRELLA OF MESSERSCHMITTS WAS CRUISING, HIDING IN THE MORNING SUN ...

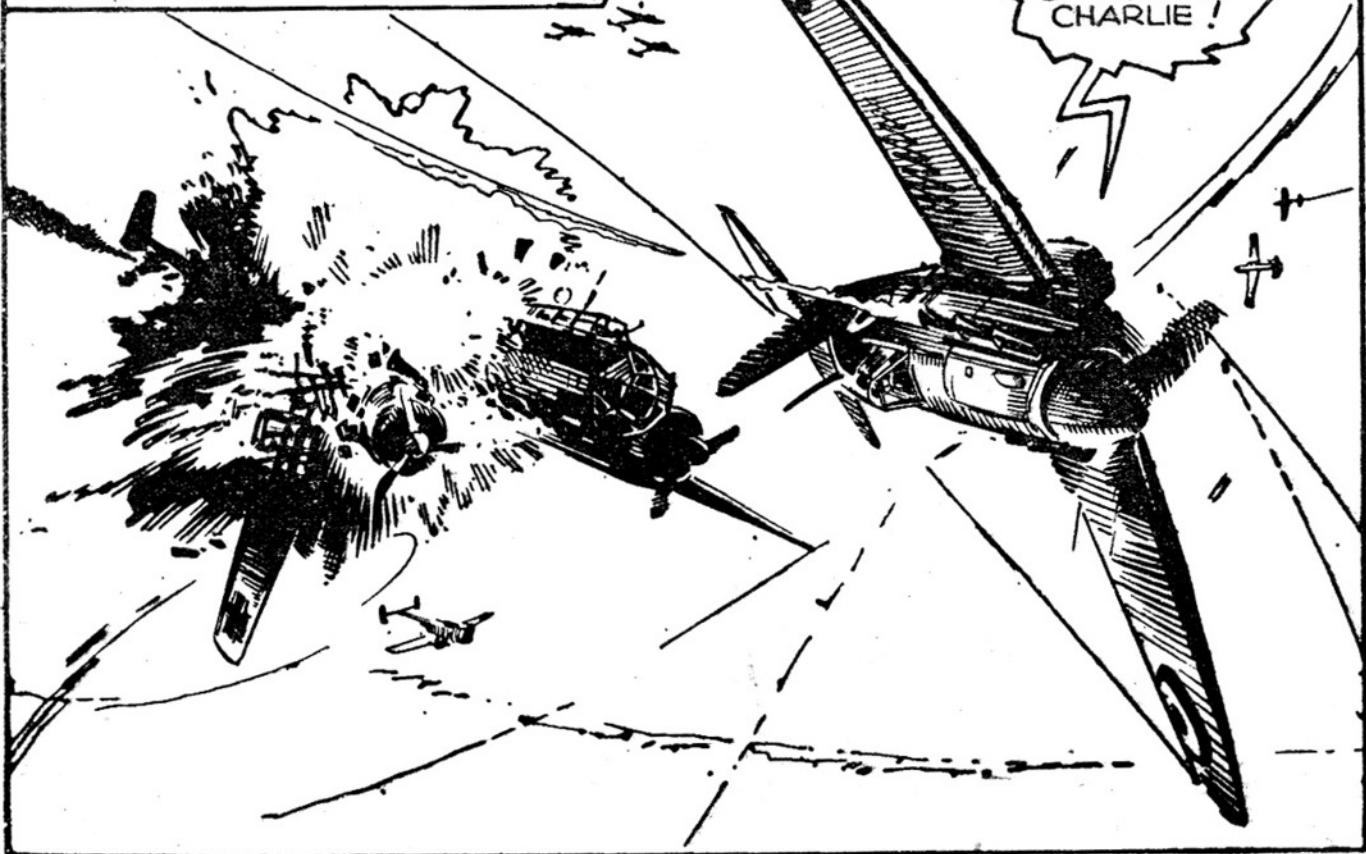
FORMATIONS FIER,
FUNFF ~ KEEP THE
ENGLISH FIGHTERS
BUSY! THE BOMBERS
MUST GET THROUGH--
WE ARE GOING DOWN
TO HELP!



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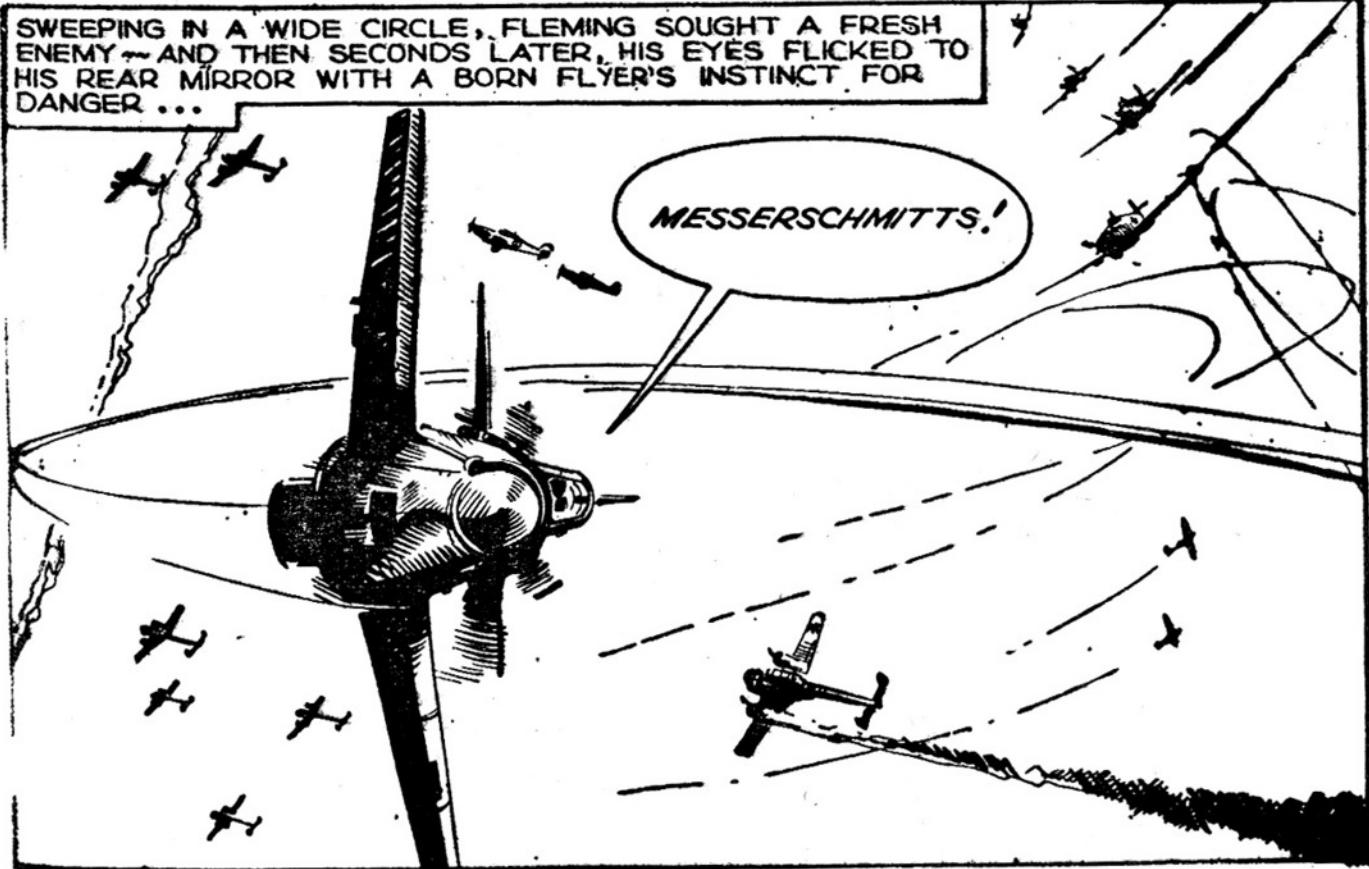
8,000 FEET BELOW, FLEMING SAW A BLACK-CROSSED FUSELAGE DISSOLVE UNDER HIS SIGHTS ~ THEN THE SKY WAS FILLED WITH DEBRIS ...

CHALK ONE UP TO RED CHARLIE!

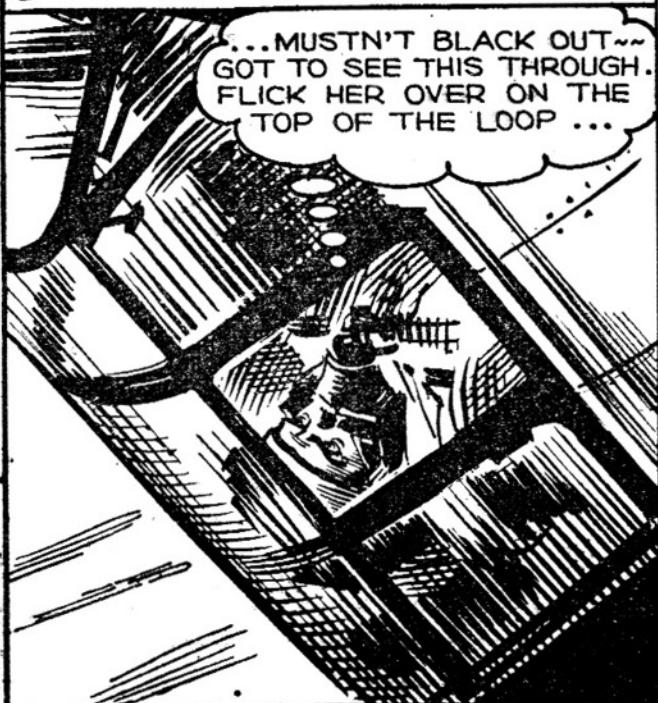


SWEEPING IN A WIDE CIRCLE, FLEMING SOUGHT A FRESH ENEMY ~ AND THEN SECONDS LATER, HIS EYES FLICKED TO HIS REAR MIRROR WITH A BORN FLYER'S INSTINCT FOR DANGER ...

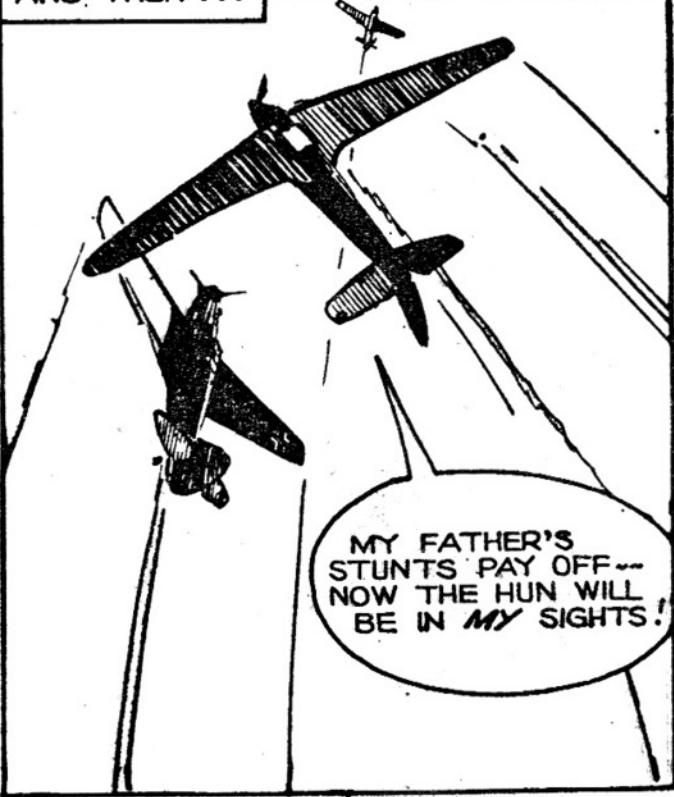
MESSERSCHMITTS!



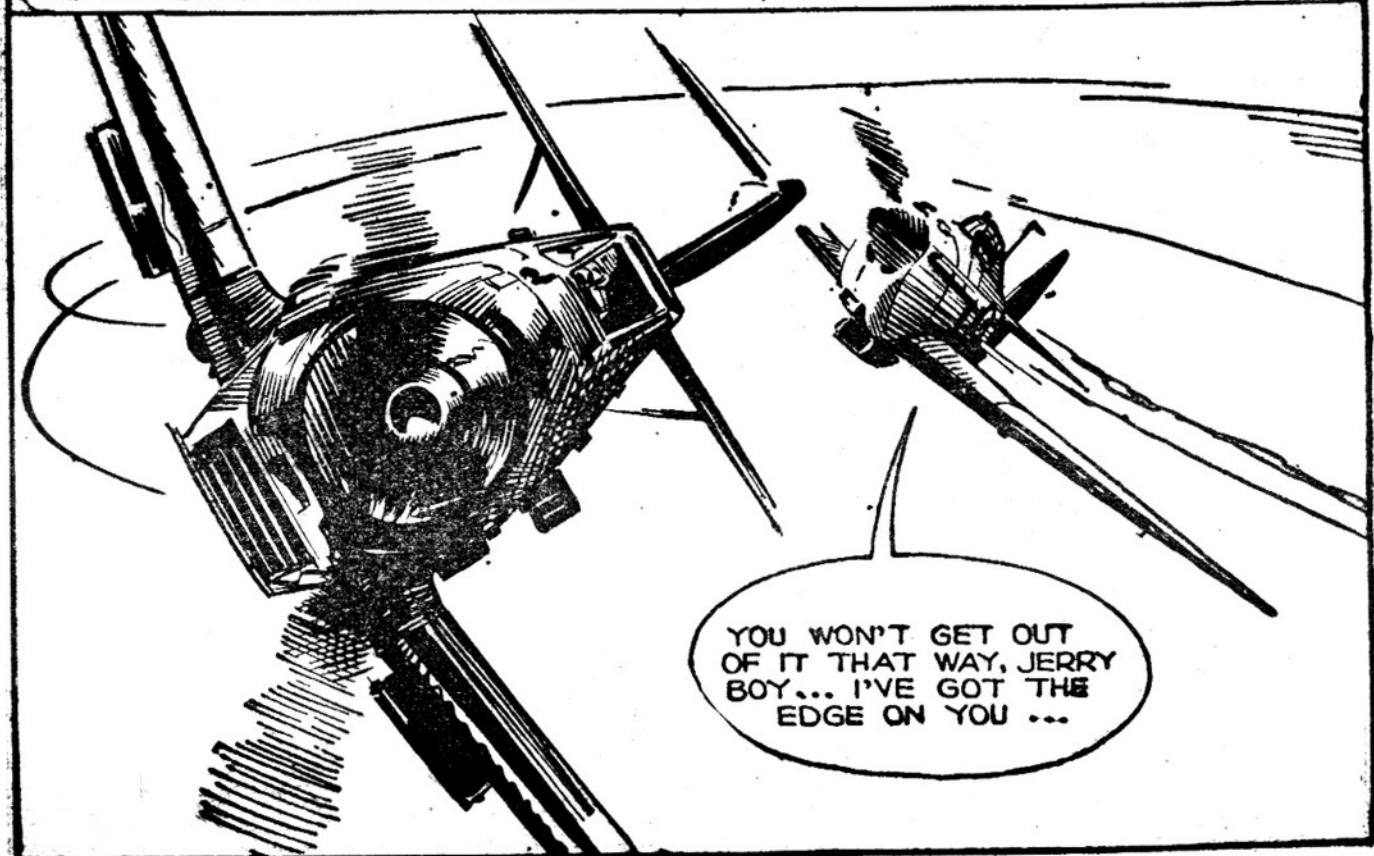
IT WAS IN MOMENTS OF EXTREME PERIL THAT DONALD SHOWED HE WAS HIS FATHER'S SON -- AND NOW, WITH A SPLIT SECOND IN WHICH TO ACT, HE PULLED THE STICK BACK INTO HIS STOMACH -- AND HIS SENSES BLURRED AS THE STRAINING HURRICANE CAME UP INTO A TIGHT LOOP ...



FOR FLEMING, IN THE NARROW COCKPIT. EARTH AND SKY YAWED WILDLY AS HE FLUNG THE FIGHTER THROUGH TRICKY MANOEUVRES AT THE TOP OF THE LOOP, AND THEN ...

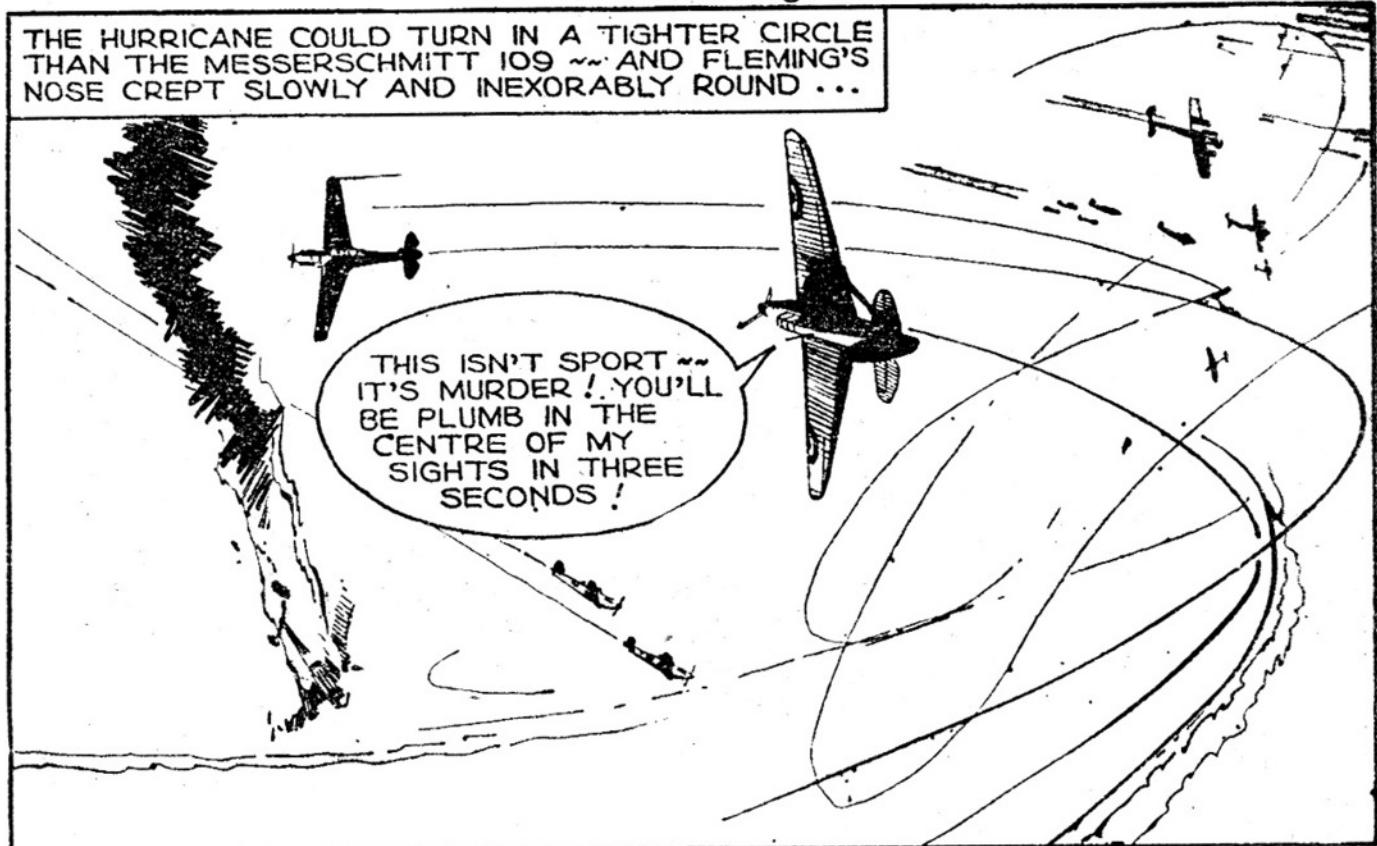


THE GERMAN FIGHTER PILOT WAS NOW THE HUNTED INSTEAD OF THE HUNTER -- AND HE FLUNG HIS MACHINE DESPERATELY INTO A TIGHT TURN TO PORT ...

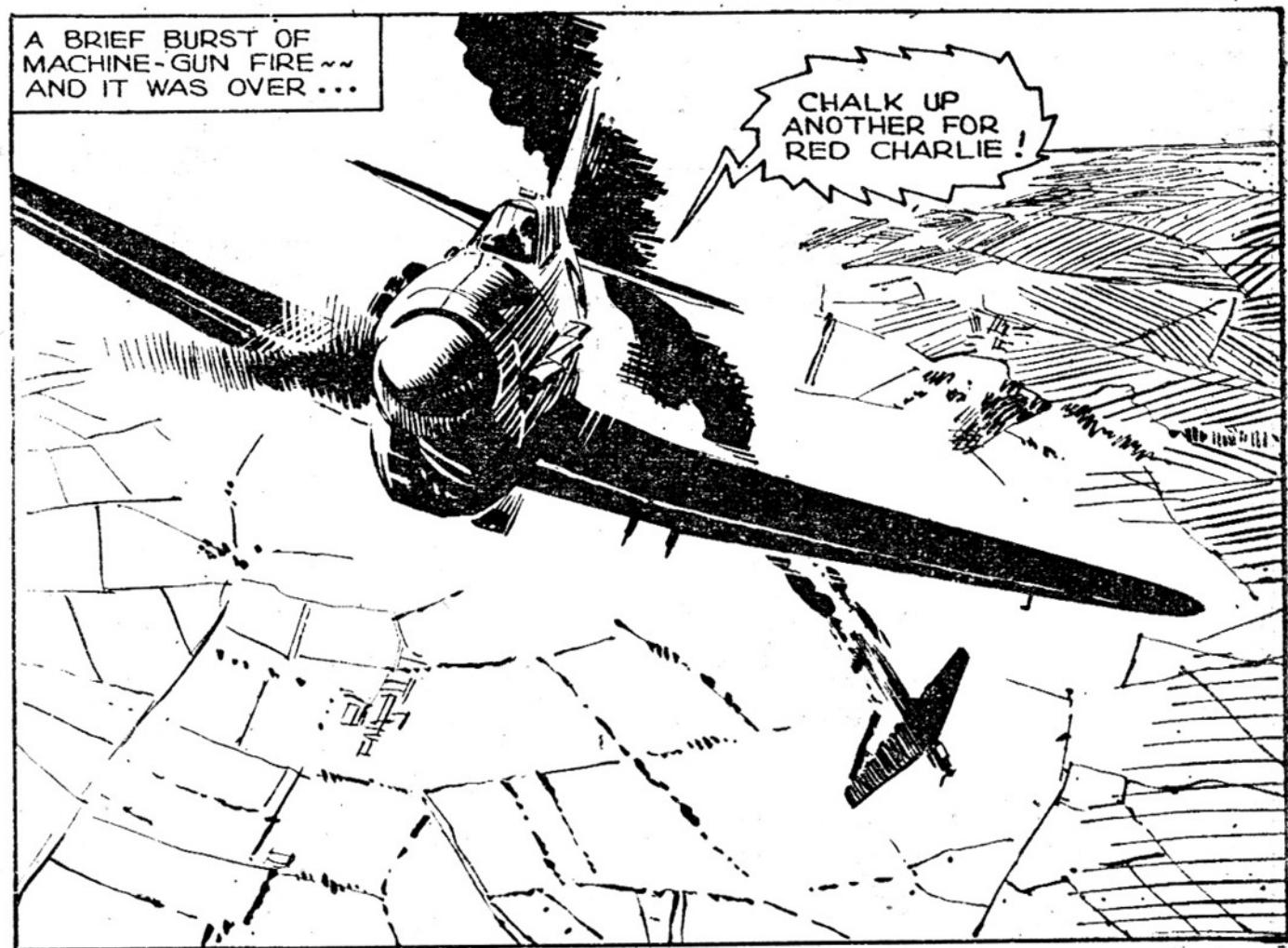


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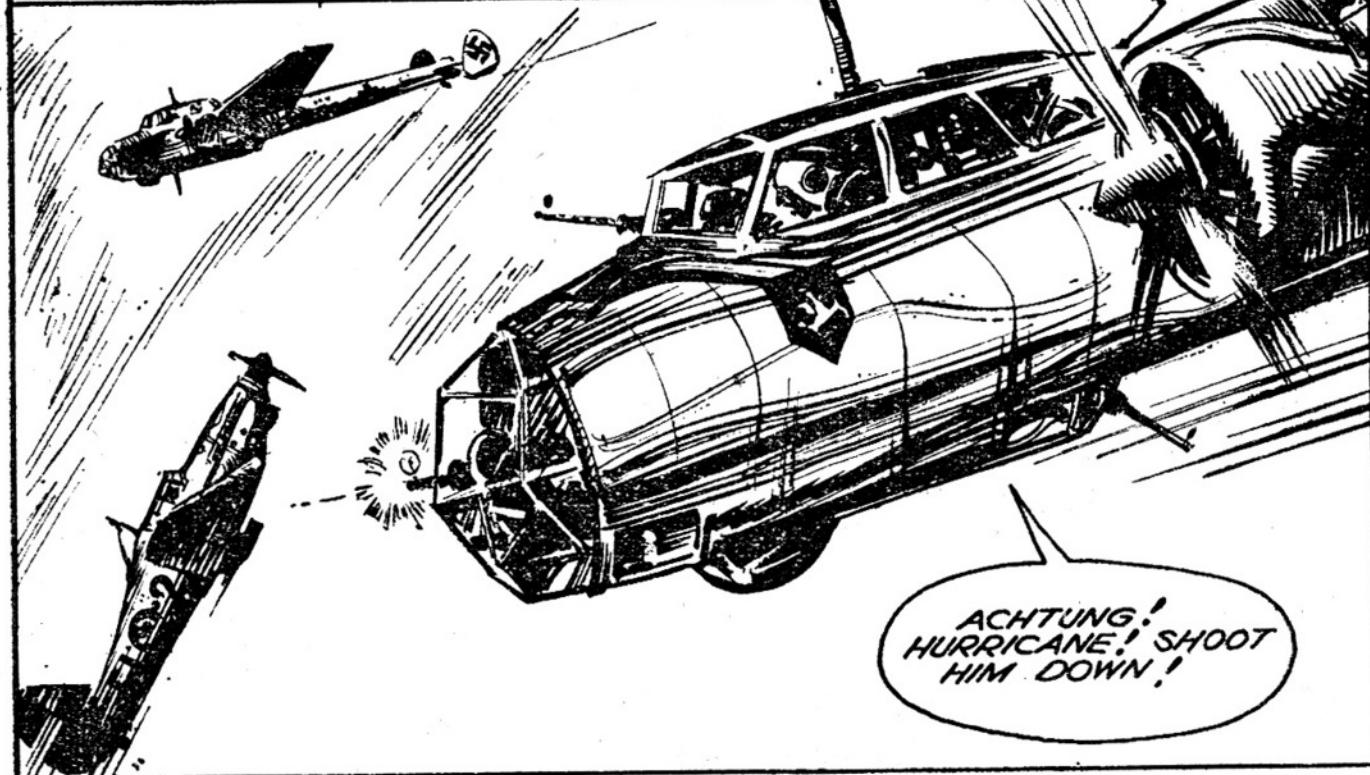
THE HURRICANE COULD TURN IN A TIGHTER CIRCLE THAN THE MESSERSCHMITT 109 ~~ AND FLEMING'S NOSE CREPT SLOWLY AND INEXORABLY ROUND ...



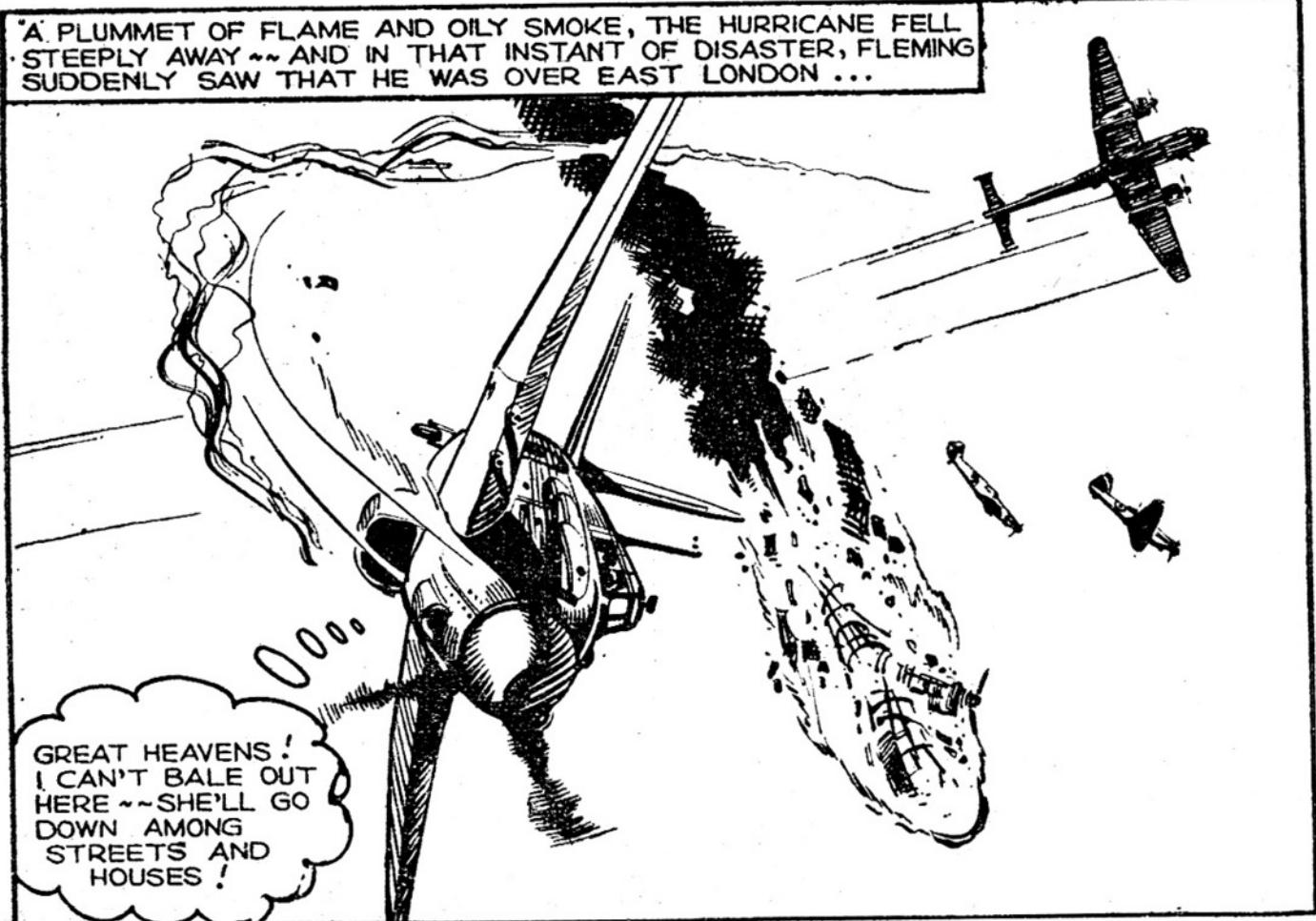
A BRIEF BURST OF
MACHINE-GUN FIRE ~~
AND IT WAS OVER ...



BUT RED CHARLIE'S OWN TIME HAD COME --
FOR IN HIS MOMENT OF VICTORY, HE FLASHED
ACROSS THE SIGHTS OF A GUNNER IN A DORNIER.



'A PLUMMET OF FLAME AND OILY SMOKE, THE HURRICANE FELL STEEPLY AWAY -- AND IN THAT INSTANT OF DISASTER, FLEMING SUDDENLY SAW THAT HE WAS OVER EAST LONDON ...



PRAYING THAT THE LABOURING ENGINE WOULD HOLD OUT, FLEMING THRUST THE THROTTLE WIDE OPEN -- AND THE DOOMED FIGHTER RACED FOR OPEN COUNTRY .

AAAGH! MY LEGS...
IT'S LIKE A FURNACE--
GOT TO STICK IT OUT--
THIRTY SECONDS
MORE



HOW FLEMING GOT OUT.
HE NEVER KNEW ...

AAGH! HOW
MY LEGS HURT
MY CHUTE'S
OPENING ...



HAD FLEMING LOOKED DOWN, HE WOULD HAVE SEEN THAT HIS FIGHTER HAD CRASHED ON OPEN FARMLAND -- BUT THAT FACT NOW NO LONGER MEANT ANYTHING TO HIM, FOR HE HUNG HELPLESSLY FROM THE SWAYING SHROUDS, DAZED AND DELIRIOUS ...



LATER, IT WAS A FARMHAND WHO FOUND HIM ...

SORRY TO IMPOSE ON YOU, OLD CHAP ... JUST BALED OUT ... HURT A BIT ... GOT TO GET TO A DOCTOR ...



AND THAT, FOR THE TIME BEING, WAS THE END OF THE WAR FOR PILOT OFFICER DONALD FLEMING. BUT HE WAS TOUGH, AND HIS SPIRIT WAS STRONG. IN FIVE WEEKS, HE PROGRESSSED SO FAVOURABLY THAT HE WAS ALLOWED TO RECEIVE HIS FIRST VISITOR ...



Broken Wings

FLEMING SENIOR KNEW THAT DEFEAT IN THE AIR COULD DESTROY THE NERVE. HE BEGAN TO PROBE DONALD FOR DETAILS OF THE BATTLE OVER LONDON, FEELING THAT THIS MIGHT HELP THE MIND TO HEAL AS WELL AS THE BODY ...

TELL ME, DONALD --
HOW DID YOU GET
WITHIN RANGE OF THE
ENEMY GUNNER?

I SEE IT ALL NOW, DAD -- IT WAS
PLAIN SILLY! I HAD JUST SHOT UP THE
MESSERSCHMITT, AND I KNEW THE
DORNIER WAS THERE -- I SAW HIM OUT OF
THE CORNER OF MY EYE. BUT I ROLLED
OUT OF SHEER HIGH SPIRITS, AND HE
RAKED ME FROM PROP TO TAIL ...



FOR BOTH FATHER AND
SON, THE VISIT WAS
ALL TOO SHORT...

I'M SORRY, SIR,
BUT YOUR TIME IS
UP! PILOT OFFICER
FLEMING IS STILL
VERY WEAK.

WELL, GOODBYE, DONALD...
I'LL COME AGAIN AS SOON
AS THEY'LL LET ME!

SORRY TO LET THE
SIDE DOWN, DAD -- IT'S
A GREEN RUB GETTING
SHOT DOWN IN MY FIRST
ENGAGEMENT! IF YOU HAD
BEEN IN THAT HURRICANE
THINGS WOULD'VE WORKED
OUT VERY DIFFERENTLY.



AS FLEMING'S FATHER DROVE AWAY FROM THE HOSPITAL, HE TURNED OVER IN HIS MIND WHAT HIS SON HAD SAID ...

... DON HAS JUST COME THROUGH THE TOUGHEST EXPERIENCE ANY FIGHTER PILOT CAN HAVE... YET HE STILL THINKS THAT IN HIS POSITION I WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER! YET HERE I AM, LETTING YOUNGER MEN FIGHT THE WAR. IF I'M THE PILOT MY SON THINKS I AM, WHY AM I NOT FLYING A FIGHTER NOW?



BY THE TIME FLEMING SENIOR REACHED LONDON, HIS MIND WAS MADE UP. HE WENT STRAIGHT TO VISIT A MAN WHO HAD BEEN HIS COMRADE IN THE FIRST AIR WAR, AND WAS NOW A HIGH R.A.F. STAFF OFFICER.

THIS IS THE POINT, JIMMY! IF I'M AS GOOD A PILOT AS YOU'RE ALWAYS SAYING I AM, WHY AM I NOT FLYING? THE COUNTRY NEEDS PILOTS -- SIGN ME ON AND GIVE ME MY WINGS!

IT CAN'T BE DONE, TOM! YOU'RE TOO OLD! I CAN GET YOU A DESK JOB IN AIR MINISTRY ANY TIME YOU LIKE.



BUT FLEMING SENIOR WAS DETERMINED, SO HE TOOK THE DESK JOB OFFERED. AND WHILE HIS SON WAS IN HOSPITAL, PLUNGED DEEPLY INTO THE WARTIME BUSINESS OF THE AIR MINISTRY...

FLEMING, AS AN OLD WARTIME FLYER WITH GREAT EXPERIENCE, HOW WOULD YOU GUIDE A VAST FORCE OF BOMBERS TO HIT A GERMAN CITY HERE? HOW WOULD YOU PINPOINT THEIR TARGETS FOR THEM?

I'D SEND IN LONG-RANGE FIGHTERS AHEAD OF THE BOMBERS, SIR. THEY'D HAVE SUFFICIENT SPEED TO GET THROUGH THE DEFENCES -- AND THEN THEY WOULD DROP MARKER FLARES, SO THAT THE MAIN BOMBER FORCE COULD DROP THEIR LOAD FROM THE GREATEST POSSIBLE ALTITUDE.



Broken Wings

SQUADRON LEADER FLEMING WAS ONLY EXPRESSING WHAT WAS IN MANY EXPERIENCED OFFICERS' MINDS -- FOR THE SCALE OF THE COMING AIR WAR WOULD GO FAR BEYOND EXISTING PINPOINT BOMB-AIMING TECHNIQUES.

WE'RE WORKING ALONG THOSE LINES ALREADY, FLEMING -- WE'VE GOT A NEW FOUR-ENGINED BOMBER ON THE STOCKS THAT WILL CARRY THE LOAD WE WANT -- AND WE'RE ALSO BUILDING A TWIN-ENGINED FIGHTER-BOMBER THAT HAS THE SPEED AND RANGE!

I'M GLAD THAT THINGS ARE MOVING SO FAST!



FLEMING WAS AMONG THE OFFICERS WHO WENT TO WATCH THE TRIALS OF THE NEW BOMBER, THREE MONTHS LATER ..

THIS IS THE AVRO MANCHESTER. IT'S THE PROTOTYPE OF A FOUR-ENGINED MACHINE WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY GO INTO MASS PRODUCTION! THIS VERSION IS SOLVING ALL OUR DESIGN PROBLEMS.



THE LATER MACHINE WILL BE CALLED THE LANCASTER ...

Broken Wings

SQUADRON LEADER FLEMING RELAYED MANY OF THE NEW DEVELOPMENTS TO HIS SON.

SO THE FIGHTER IS ON ITS WAY OUT ~ AND THE BOMBER IS ON THE WAY IN !

NO ~ IT ISN'T THAT, DONALD, TO HIT AT GERMANY, WE MUST HAVE MACHINES WITH CAPACITY AND RANGE. THE FIGHTER HAS BEEN A DEFENSIVE WEAPON ~ AND NOW WE'RE GOING OVER TO THE OFFENSIVE !



AS FLEMING SENIOR LEFT THE WARD THAT DAY, HE WEIGHED UP HIS LAST WORDS ...

... AND THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO DO ~ GO ON THE 'OFFENSIVE' ~ IT'S TIME I GOT INTO THE AIR ~ TIME I HANDLED A MACHINE ...



Chapter 2.

CRY FOR HELP

IT WAS NINE MONTHS BEFORE DONALD FLEMING RECOVERED SUFFICIENTLY FROM HIS BURNS TO GO BACK ON ACTIVE SERVICE. IN THAT TIME, THE WAR HAD MOVED ON. THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN HAD BEEN FOUGHT AND WON. WITH FIGHTER COMMAND TRIUMPHANTLY PROTECTING THE HOME SKIES, THERE WAS A NEW SPIRIT IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE. AIR STAFF ~~ FLEMING'S FATHER AMONG THEM ~~ WERE WORKING NIGHT AND DAY TO CREATE AN IMMENSE NEW BOMBER FORCE THAT WOULD STRIKE INTO THE HEART OF GERMANY.

I'VE BROUGHT IT OFF AT LAST, DONALD ~~ I'M GOING ON FLYING SERVICE. YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THE ATLANTIC FERRY SERVICE TO BRING OVER THE NEW BOMBERS FROM CANADA ~~ WELL, I'VE PESTERED THEM SO MUCH THAT THEY'VE FINALLY ACCEPTED ME!

AND ABOUT TIME, TOO! HOW THEY CAN KEEP A MAN LIKE YOU TIED DOWN TO A DESK JOB BEATS ME!



IT SEEMED THAT CHANGES WERE IN THE AIR FOR THE FLEMINGS ~~ FOR WHEN DONALD FLEMING GOT BACK TO HIS SQUADRON, HIS C.O. HAD AN INTERESTING PROPOSITION TO PUT TO HIM ...

YOU CAN STILL HANDLE A HURRICANE, IT SEEKS. LOOK, FLEMING, SOMETHING RATHER NOVEL'S TURNED UP, AND I'M GOING TO BRING YOU IN ON IT BEFORE ANYBODY ELSE! YOU'VE BEEN IN DOCK FOR NINE MONTHS, AND YOU'RE PROBABLY FEELING A BIT OF A LONE WOLF ...



THE NAVY WANTS US TO LEND THEM A FEW TRAINED COMBAT PILOTS! THEY'VE STARTED LAUNCHING HURRICANES OFF MERCHANT SHIPS TO COMBAT LONG-RANGE HEINKELS ATTACKING SHIPPING CONVOYS ...

WAIT TILL YOU HEAR **EVERYTHING**, FLEMING ~ THIS IS PRETTY DICEY! YOU'LL BE LAUNCHED BY CATAULPT ~ WHICH MEANS THAT WHEN YOUR FUEL RUNS OUT, YOU DITCH YOUR HURRICANE AND START SWIMMING FOR IT! REMEMBER THAT THIS IS THE NORTH ATLANTIC ...

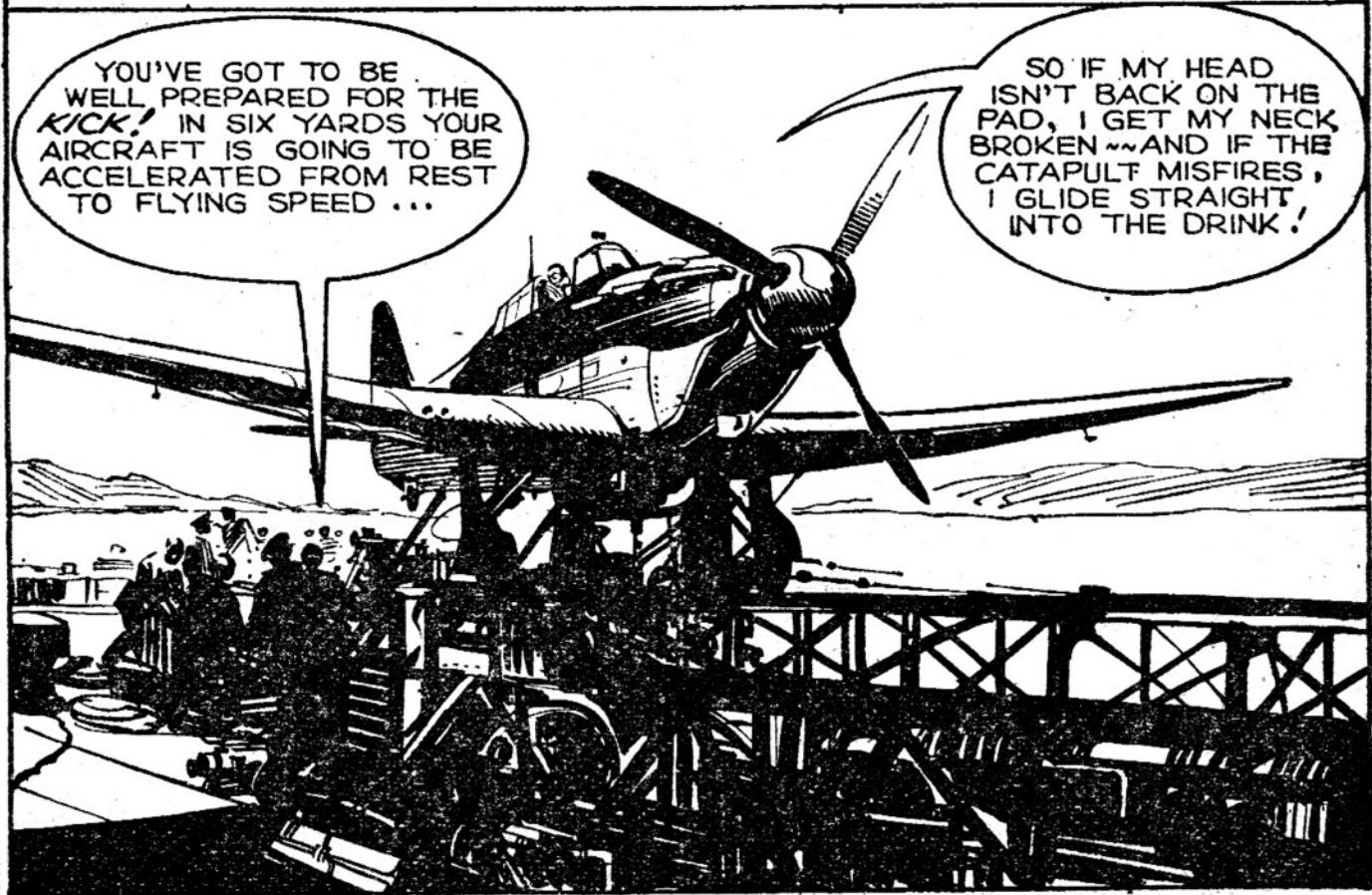
JUST MY PIECE OF CAKE, SIR!



BUT FLEMING WAS SOLD ON THE IDEA ~ AND WITH HIS C.O.'S PERMISSION, HE PUT IN FOR THE SPECIAL POSTING. LESS THAN A WEEK LATER HE WAS AT A NAVAL TRAINING STATION, GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH CATAULPT LAUNCHING ...

YOU'VE GOT TO BE WELL PREPARED FOR THE KICK! IN SIX YARDS YOUR AIRCRAFT IS GOING TO BE ACCELERATED FROM REST TO FLYING SPEED ...

SO IF MY HEAD ISN'T BACK ON THE PAD, I GET MY NECK BROKEN ~ AND IF THE CATAULPT MISFIRE, I GLIDE STRAIGHT INTO THE DRINK!



Broken Wings

ON HIS LAST LEAVE BEFORE OPERATIONAL DUTY WITH CONVOYS, FLEMING WENT TO LONDON TO SEE HIS FATHER ...

WHY CAN'T THEY REALISE, DAD, THAT IT WAS YOU, AND THE MEN LIKE YOU, WHO INVENTED THEIR TESTS !

WELL, I'VE PASSED ALL THE TESTS, DESPITE EVERYTHING THEY SAID ABOUT MY AGE !

ANYWAY, NEXT WEEK I'M OFF TO CANADA BY AIR TRANSPORT ~~ THERE'S A BATCH OF US GOING TOGETHER. EACH MAN WILL COME BACK FLYING HIS OWN BOMBER .

FATHER AND SON SAID GOODBYE, NOT KNOWING WHEN THEY WOULD NEXT MEET, AND DONALD STOOD WITH A LUMP IN HIS THROAT, WATCHING THE ALERT FIGURE STRIDE OFF INTO THE CROWD .

GOOD LUCK GO WITH YOU ~~ YOU'RE THE FINEST MAN I'VE EVER MET. I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER COME UP TO YOUR STANDARDS, BUT I'LL KEEP ON TRYING...YES, I PROMISE YOU THAT!



LATE THE FOLLOWING DAY, DONALD FLEMING WAS AT A NORTHERN SCOTTISH PORT, READY FOR DUTY ...

COULD THIS SHIP, BY ANY CHANCE, BE MISTAKEN FOR AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER ?

THAT'S RIGHT, SIR ! I TAKE IT YOU'RE THE PILOT !



Broken Wings

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THE S.S. BANGOR SAILED TO JOIN THE REST OF THE CONVOY
OF TWENTY SHIPS, WITH ONLY TWO NAVY CORVETTES ESCORTING ...

IF THE SUBMARINES FIND US, IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN
TWO CORVETTES TO SORT THEM OUT! IF THE
BOMBERS FIND US, IT'LL BE
ONE FIGHTER PROBABLY
AGAINST A SQUADRON!

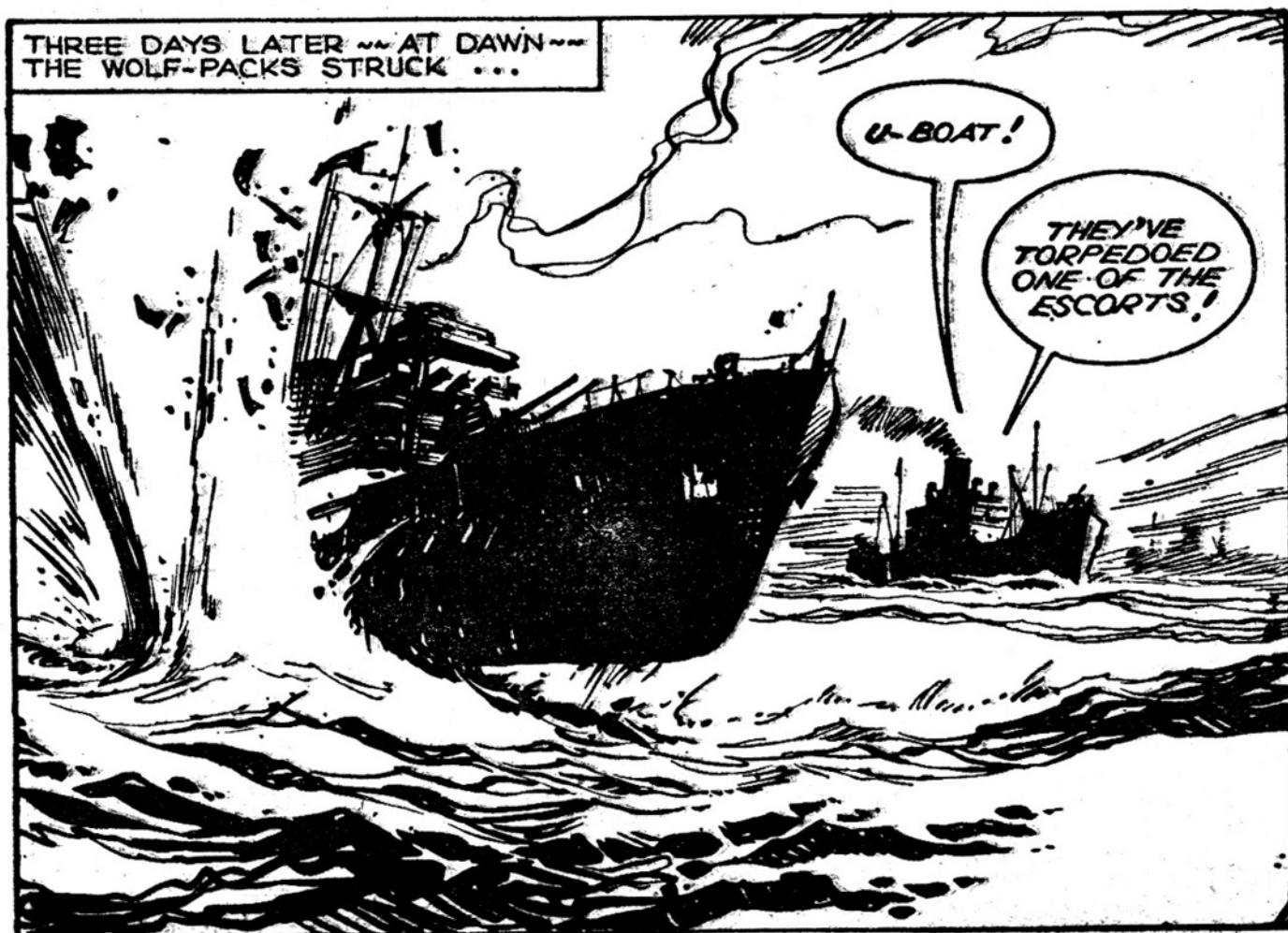
YOU DON'T SOUND
VERY OPTIMISTIC,
SKIPPER!



THREE DAYS LATER -- AT DAWN --
THE WOLF-PACKS STRUCK ...

U-BOAT!

THEY'VE
TORPEDOED
ONE OF THE
ESCAPES!





FLEMING RAISED A GLOVED HAND ABOVE THE COCKPIT COMBING ~~
AND WITH A COLOSSAL THUD AND JERK THE CATAPULT HURLED THE
HURRICANE OUT ACROSS THE STERN OF THE SHIP LIKE A WINGED STONE ...



SKIMMING THE WAVES, THE FIGHTER STREAKED ACROSS THE OPEN SEA ...

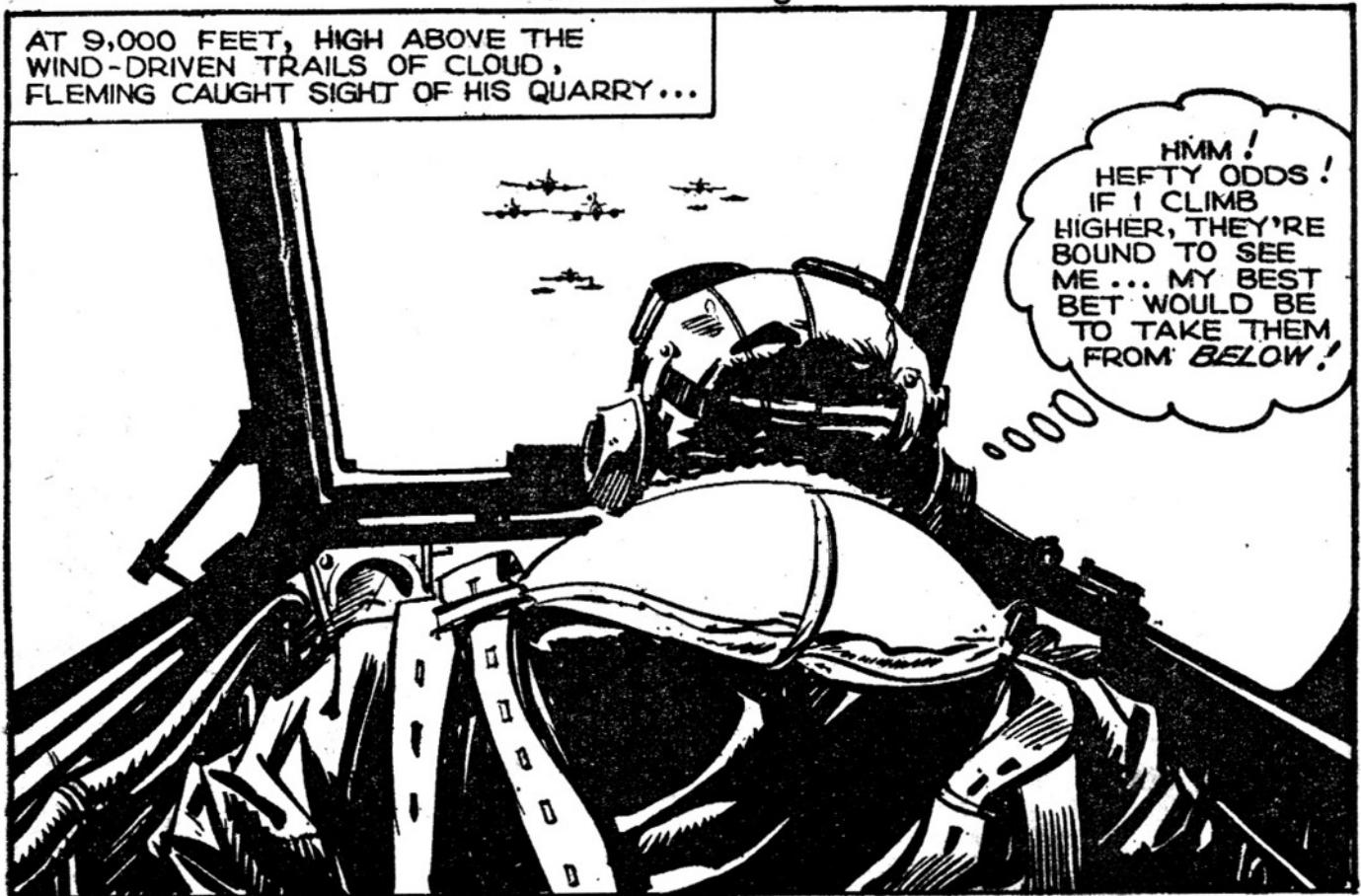
SLINGSHOT TO RED TWO ~~ WHERE ARE THE BANDITS? OVER!

RED TWO TO SLINGSHOT -- THAT WAS THE NEAREST THING TO SURF-RIDING WE EVER SAW ~~ BANDITS NORTH-EAST BY EAST, ANGELS EIGHT ~~ WE COUNT THEM AS NINE ... OVER !

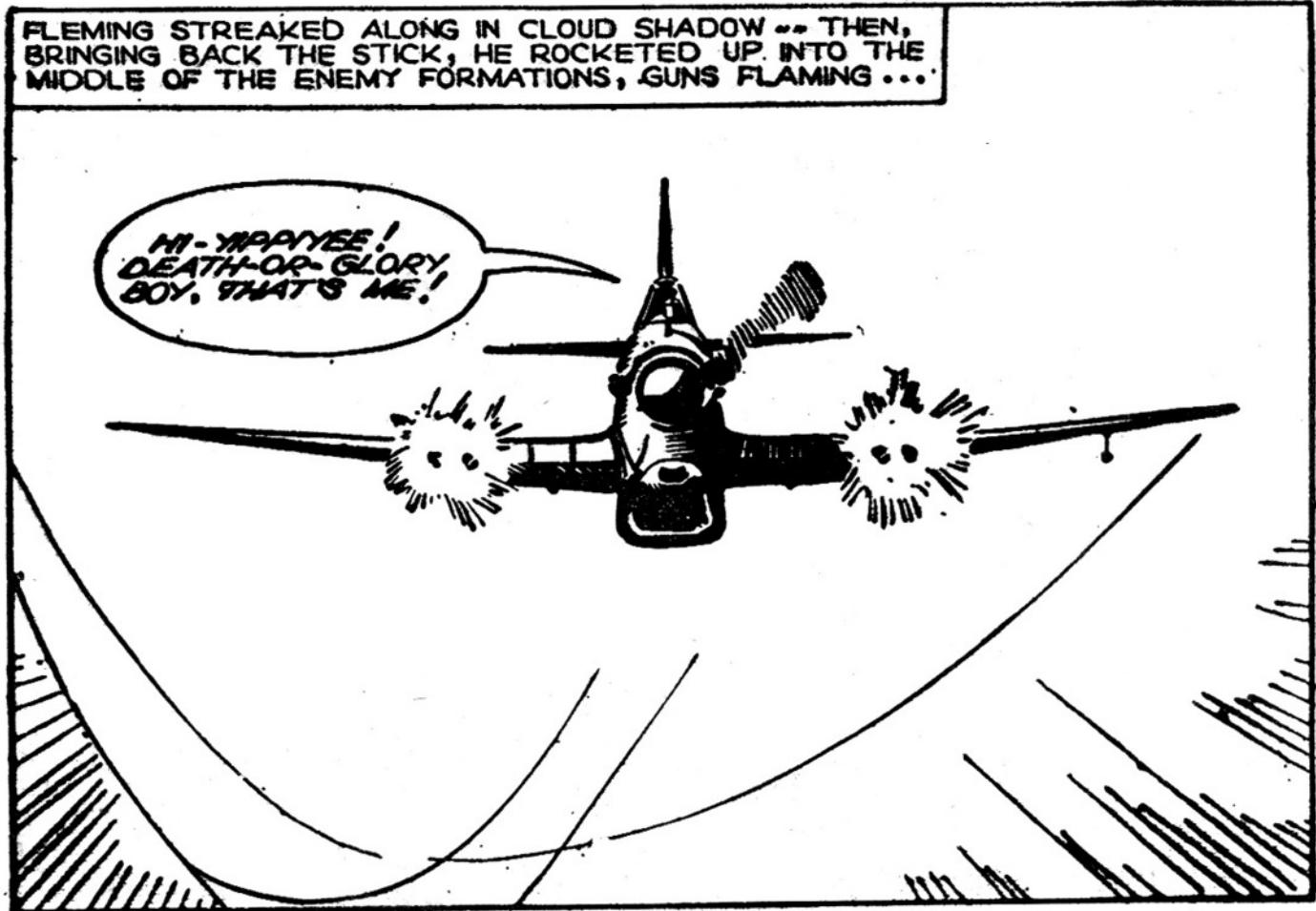


Broken Wings

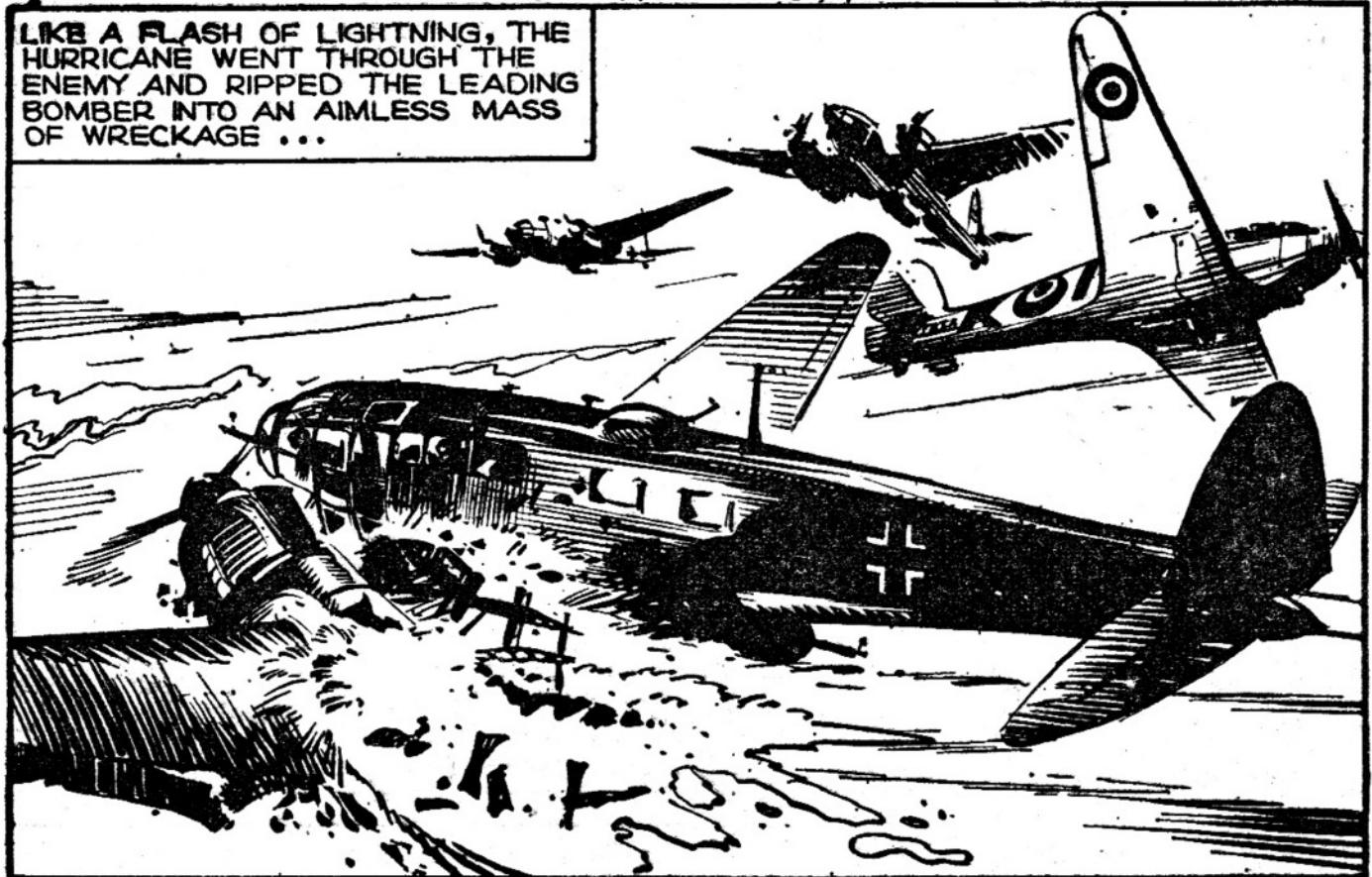
AT 9,000 FEET, HIGH ABOVE THE WIND-DRIVEN TRAILS OF CLOUD, FLEMING CAUGHT SIGHT OF HIS QUARRY...



FLEMING STREAKED ALONG IN CLOUD SHADOW -- THEN, BRINGING BACK THE STICK, HE ROCKETED UP INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE ENEMY FORMATIONS, GUNS FLAMING ...

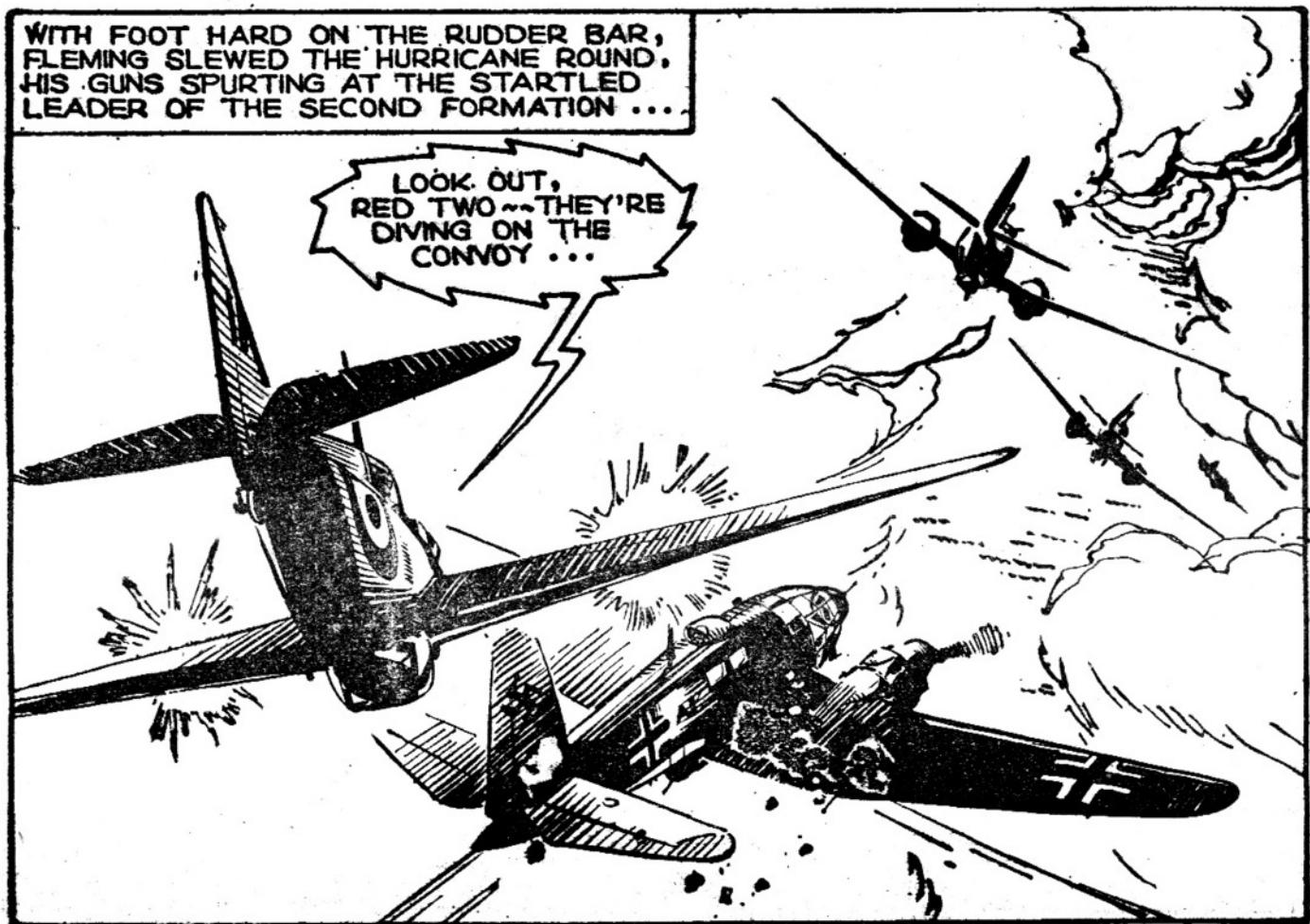


LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING, THE HURRICANE WENT THROUGH THE ENEMY AND RIPPED THE LEADING BOMBER INTO AN AIMLESS MASS OF WRECKAGE ...



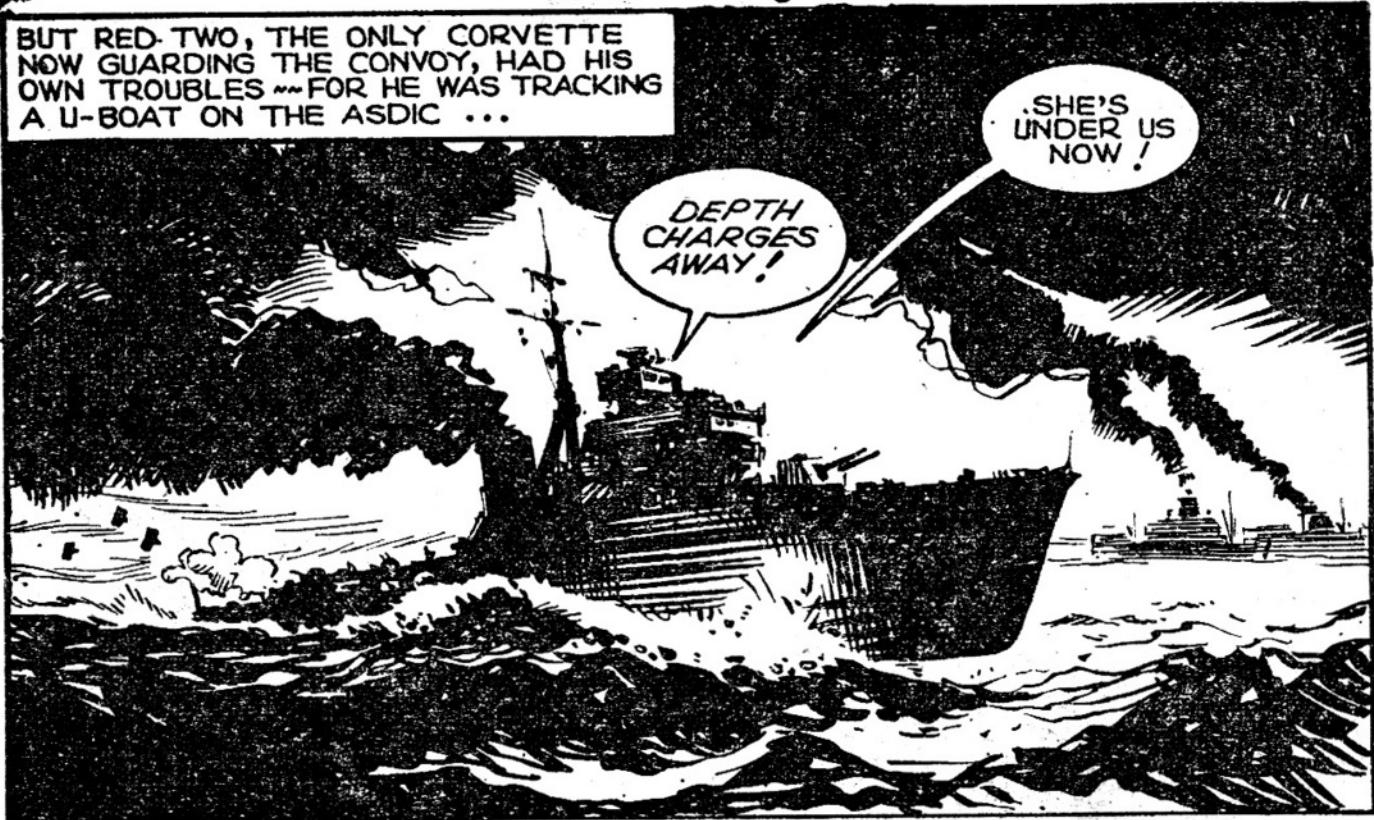
WITH FOOT HARD ON THE RUDDER BAR, FLEMING SLEwed THE HURRICANE ROUND. HIS GUNS SPURTING AT THE STARTLED LEADER OF THE SECOND FORMATION ...

LOOK OUT,
RED TWO ~ THEY'RE
DIVING ON THE
CONVOY ...

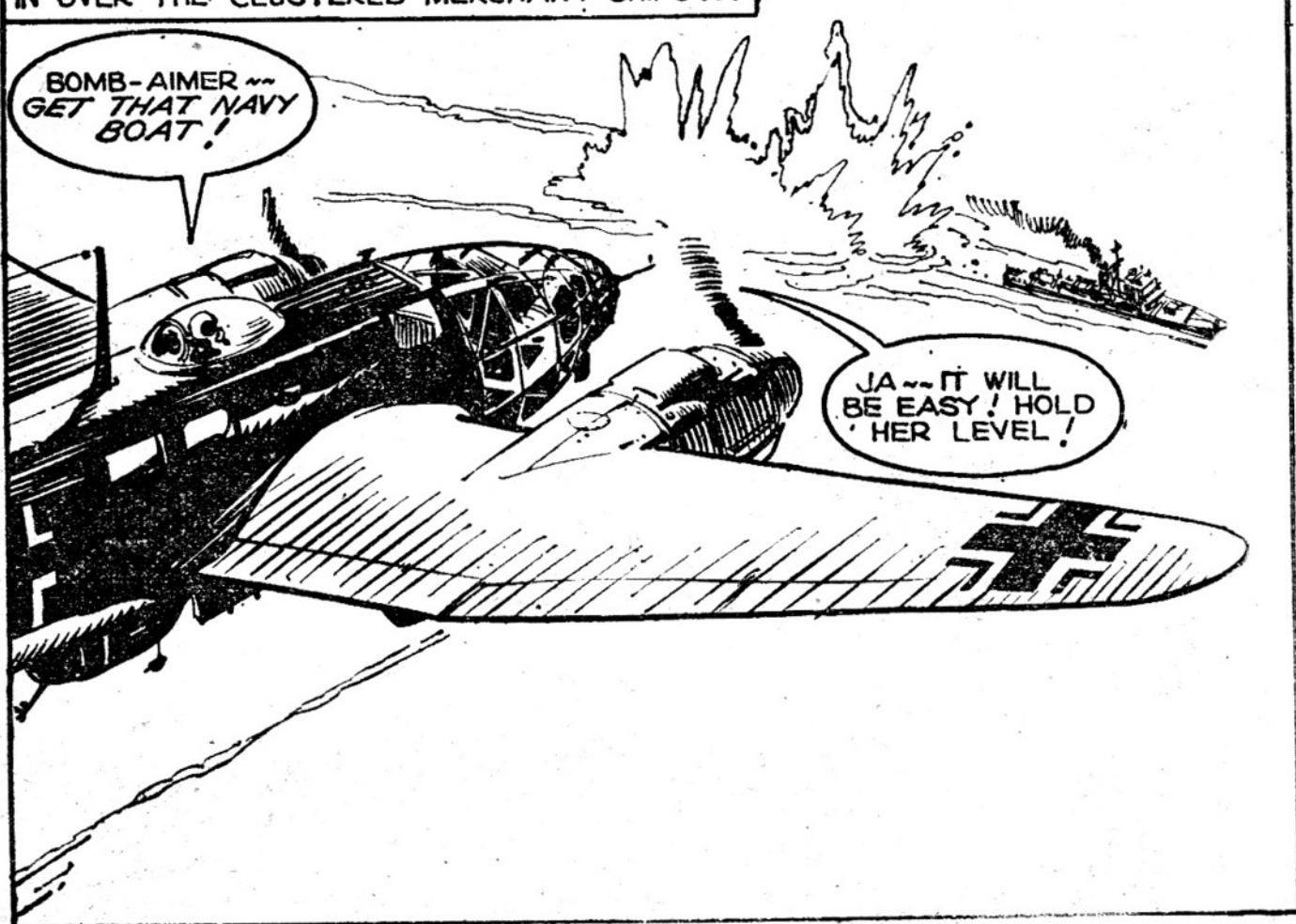


Broken Wings

BUT RED-TWO, THE ONLY CORVETTE NOW GUARDING THE CONVOY, HAD HIS OWN TROUBLES ... FOR HE WAS TRACKING A U-BOAT ON THE ASDIC ...



AND THEN, AS THE HEINKELS THUNDERED IN OVER THE CLUSTERED MERCHANT SHIPS ...



Broken Wings

2

FLEMING SAW THE TRAGEDY ~~ AND SWORE IN ANGUISH ...



FLEMING FLUNG HIS MACHINE RECKLESSLY ACROSS THE SKY TOWARDS THE CLIMBING ENEMY ~~ AND HIS THUMB WAS HARD ON THE FIRING-BUTTON ...



Broken Wings

AND SO FLEMING TOOK HIS TOLL, AND SWERVED ROUND AGAIN TO HARASS AND STRIKE AT THE REMAINING ENEMY. BUT THOUGH HE FOUGHT LIKE A DEMON, HE WAS ONLY ONE AGAINST SO MANY...

THERE'S
ANOTHER
DOWN!

IF IT WASN'T
FOR THAT FIGHTER
BOY, THEY WOULD
HAVE GOT HALF A
DOZEN OTHER
SHIPS AS WELL
AS US!

THE SURVIVING HEINKELS SCATTERED TO THE SOUTH ... AND SUDDENLY, IN THE MIDDLE OF A GREAT PATCH OF OIL ...

LOOK!
A U-BOAT!

IT'S BEEN
DEPTH CHARGED!
THE HULL IS
BATTERED TO
PIECES!



Broken Wings

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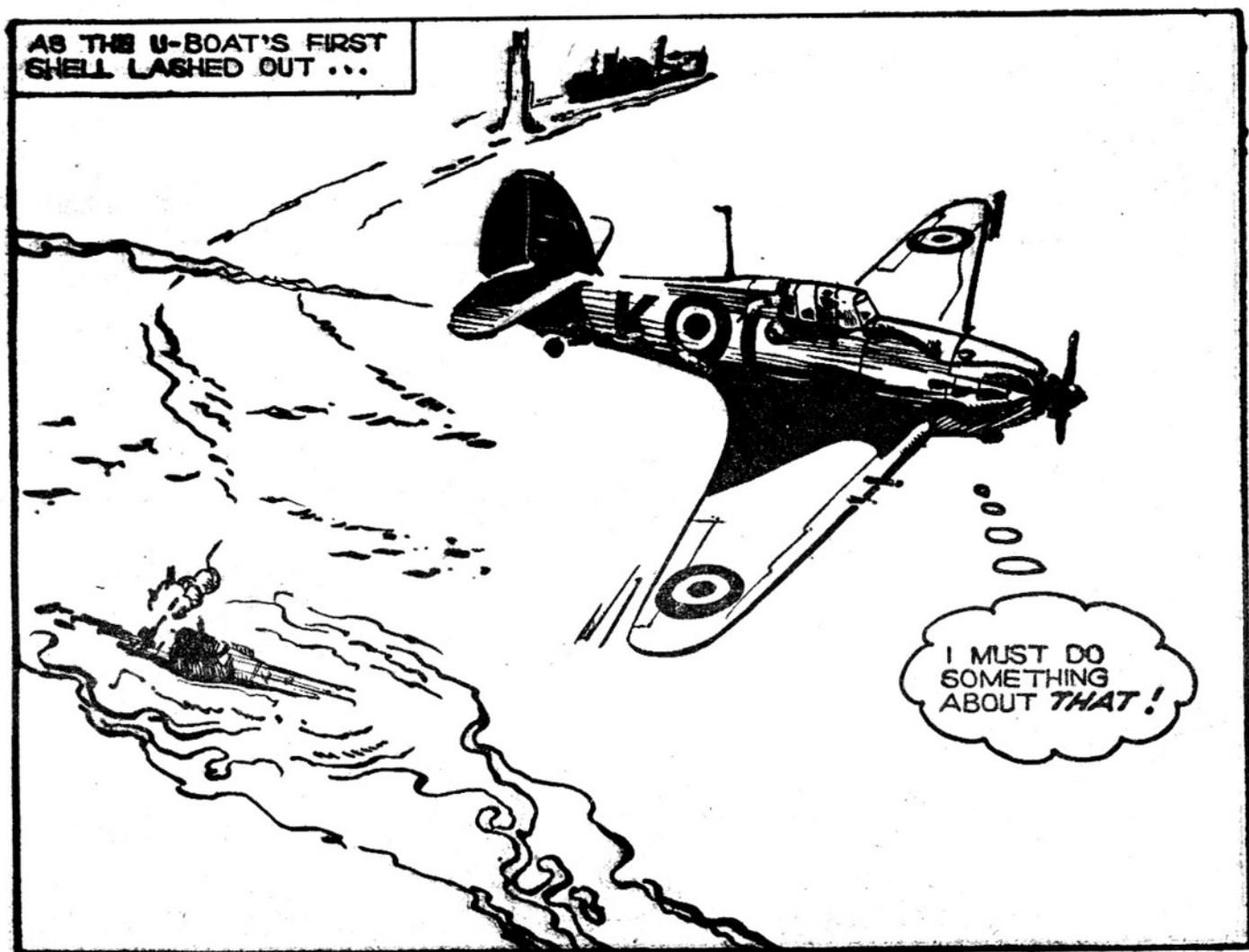
THE U-BOAT HAD TAKEN A SEVERE POUNDING, BUT HER COMMANDER WAS A TRUE WOLF OF THE SEAS -- AND HE FOUND HE STILL HAD A SERVICEABLE DECK GUN ...

GET THAT GUN GOING WHILE WE CAN STILL FLOAT! WE'LL SINK EVERYTHING WE CAN!



AS THE U-BOAT'S FIRST SHELL LASHED OUT ...

I MUST DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT!



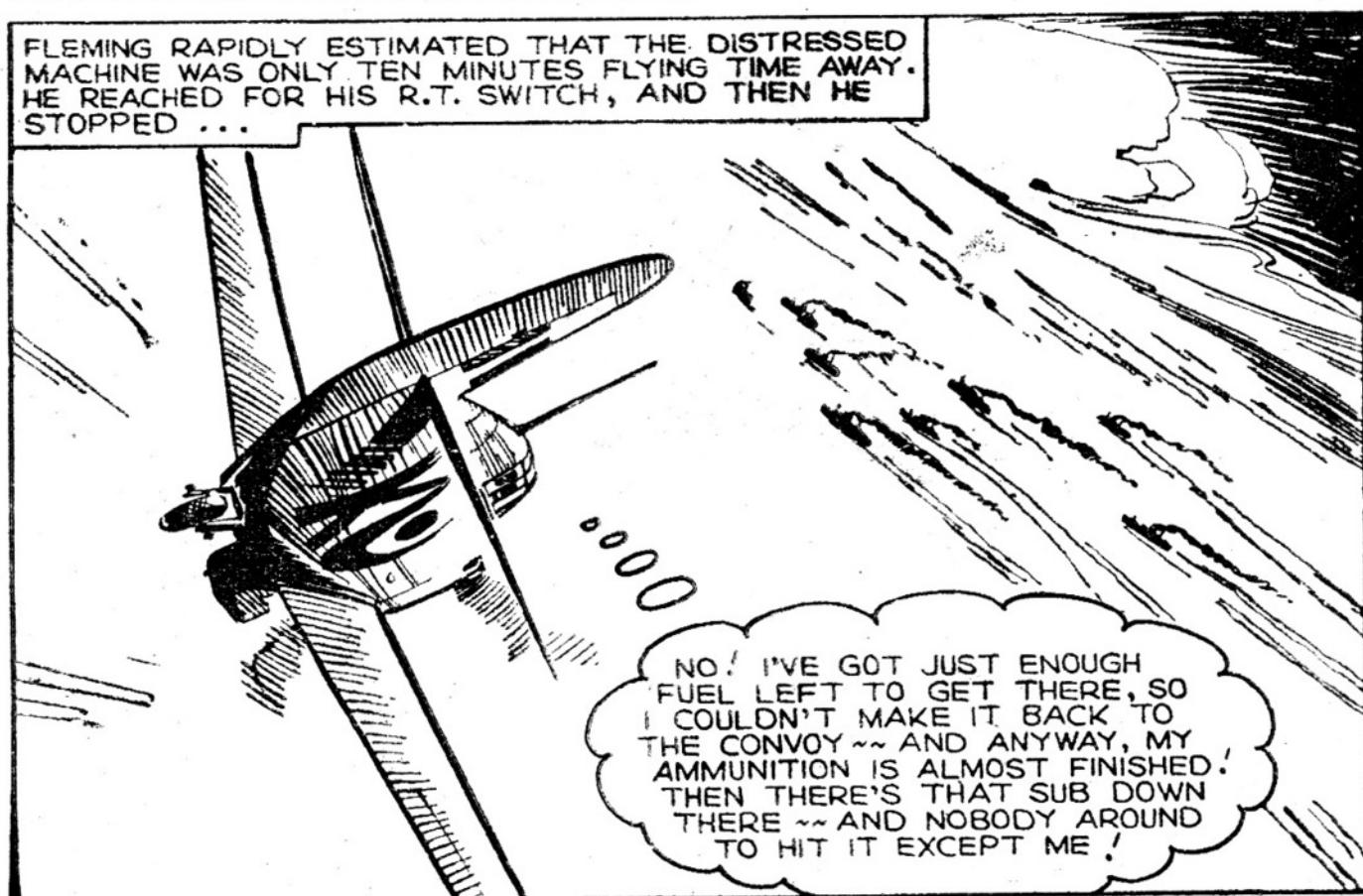
AT THAT MOMENT, A DESPERATE STACCATO RADIO MESSAGE CRACKLED FAINTLY THROUGH FLEMING'S HEADPHONES.



A LONE BRITISH AIRCRAFT ON THE NORTH ATLANTIC ROUTE HAD RUN INTO THE MARAUDERS FLEMING HAD CHASED AWAY ...



FLEMING RAPIDLY ESTIMATED THAT THE DISTRESSED MACHINE WAS ONLY TEN MINUTES FLYING TIME AWAY. HE REACHED FOR HIS R.T. SWITCH, AND THEN HE STOPPED ...



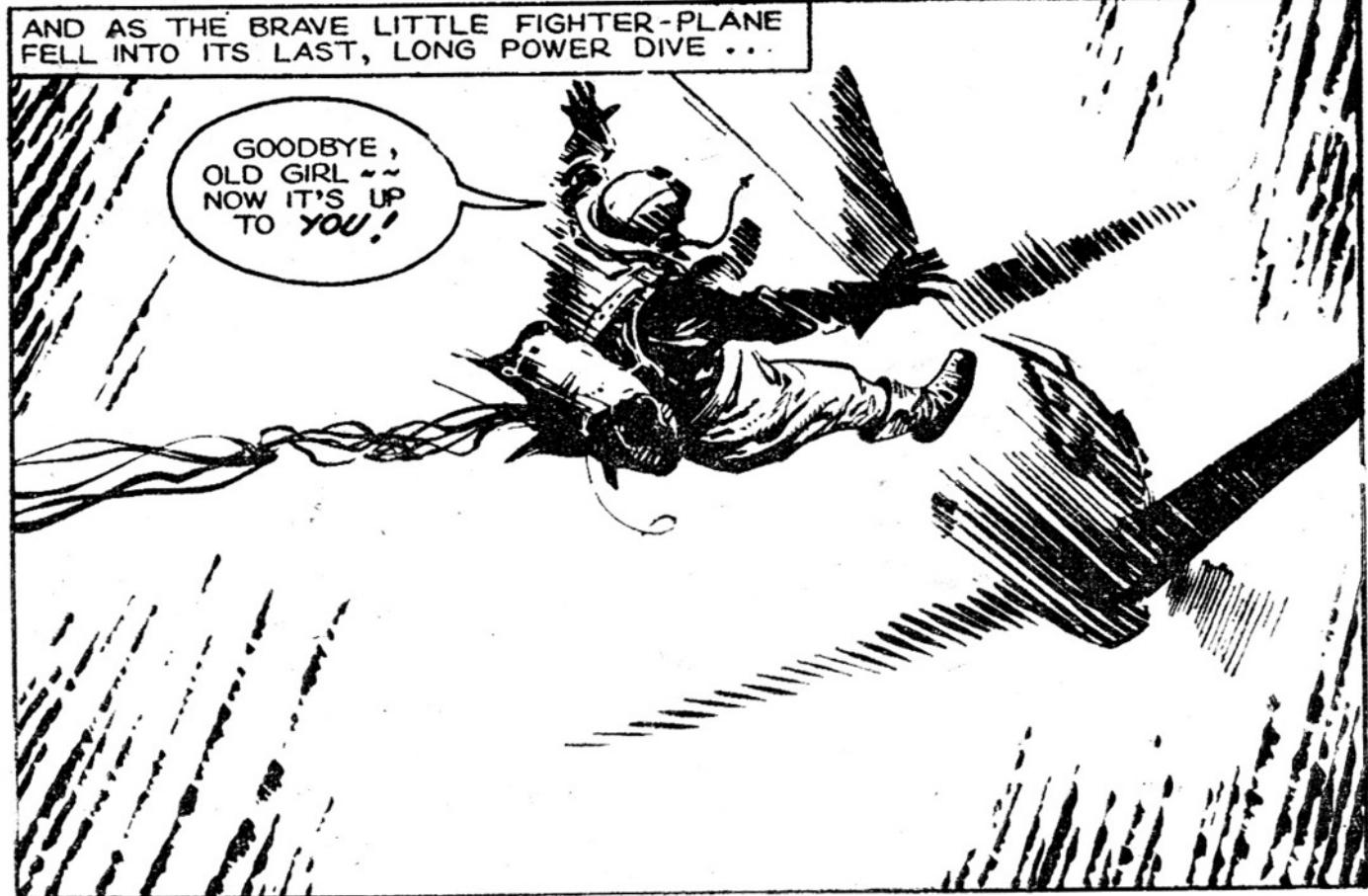
THE FLASH OF EXPLODING SHELLFIRE AMONG THE MERCHANT SHIPS FAR BELOW RAMMED HOME FLEMING'S DECISION FOR HIM ...



JAW SET, HIS EYES BLEAK, FLEMING CUT OFF THE DISTRESS SIGNAL. HE ROLLED THE HURRICANE OVER TOWARDS THE SUB, AND THRUST THE THROTTLE WIDE-OPEN ...

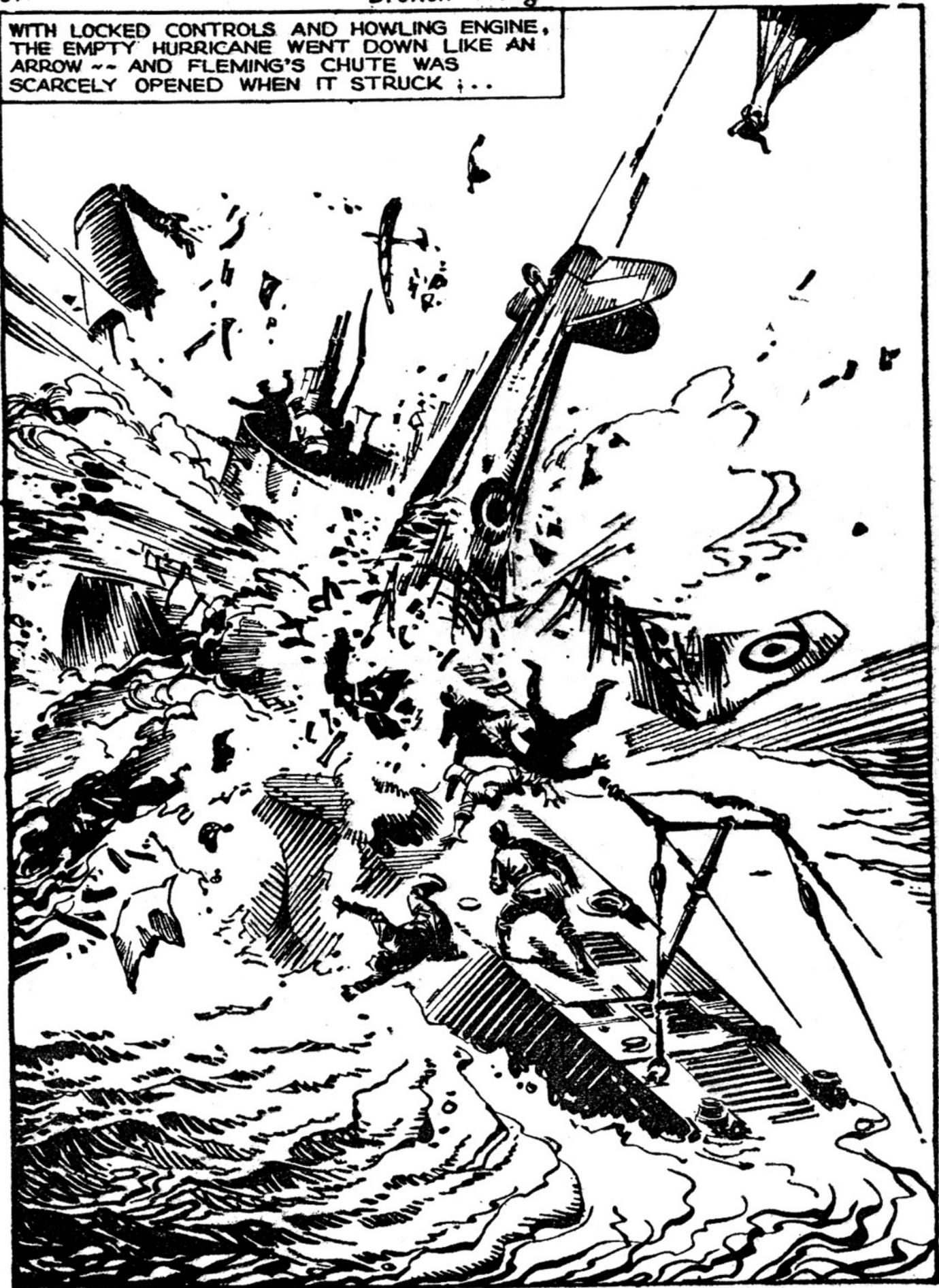


AND AS THE BRAVE LITTLE FIGHTER-PLANE FELL INTO ITS LAST, LONG POWER DIVE ...



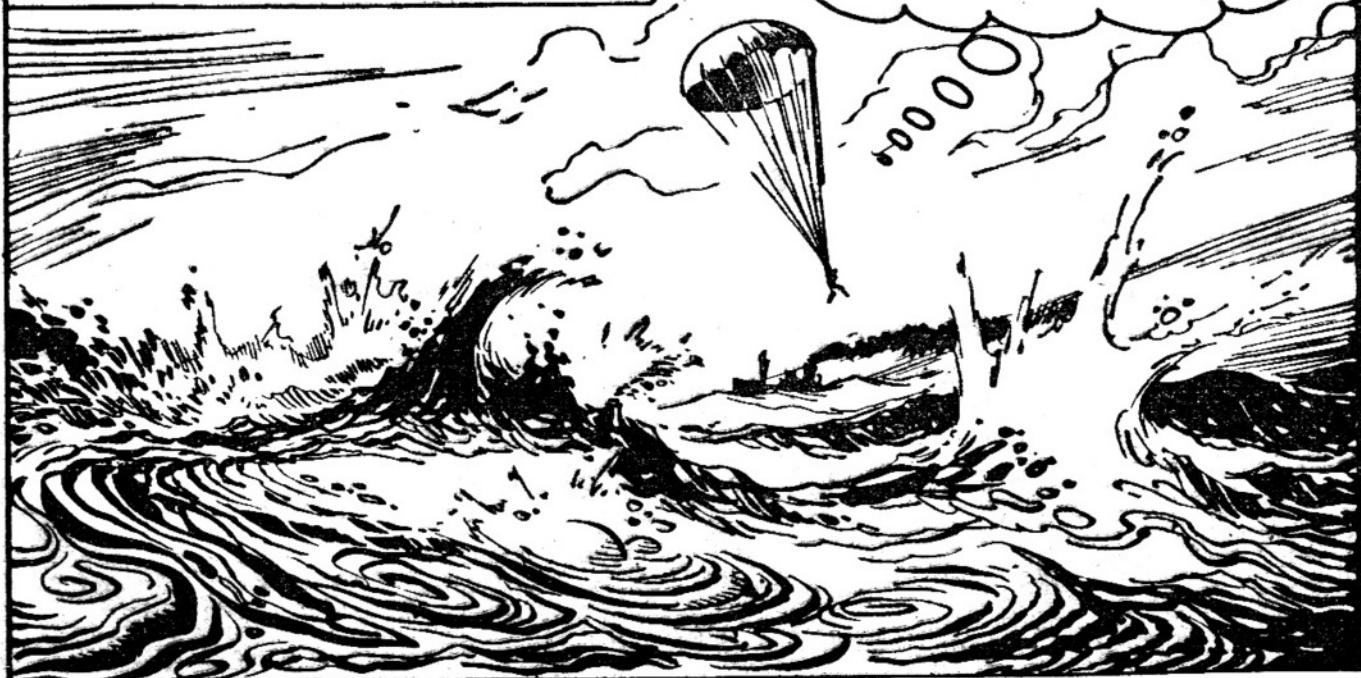
Broken Wings

WITH LOCKED CONTROLS AND HOWLING ENGINE,
THE EMPTY HURRICANE WENT DOWN LIKE AN
ARROW -- AND FLEMING'S CHUTE WAS
SCARCELY OPENED WHEN IT STRUCK ...



THE GREAT GREY HULL OF THE DOOMED U-BOAT PITCHED UP INTO THE SIGHT OF THE CONVOY SEAMEN ~ THEN IT ROLLED OVER, AND THE SEA WHERE IT HAD BEEN WAS TURBULENT WITH HUGE BUBBLES OF AIR AND OIL ...

... WAR IS A VILE BUSINESS! IT WAS EITHER THEM OR THE CONVOY ~ AND THEY WOULDN'T HAVE HAD ANY MERCY ON US! BUT IT'S STILL PRETTY VILE ...



TEN MINUTES LATER, FLEMING WAS PICKED UP BY A SHIP'S BOAT ...



LATER, ON BOARD S.S. BANGOR ...

MAGNIFICENT, FLEMING! I DID WHAT YOU SAVED THIS SHIP. I COULD, SIR ~ **TWICE** ~ AND NOW BUT I DIDN'T DO THAT THE SUBS HAVE ENOUGH! WHILE PULLED OFF, LET'S HOPE WE'LL BE FREE FROM TROUBLE THE REST OF THE WAY TO ICELAND!

I WAS UP THERE I GOT AN R.T. CALL FROM A BRITISH AIRCRAFT IN DISTRESS -- I COULD PROBABLY HAVE REACHED IT IN TEN MINUTES ...



TWO DAYS LATER, THE CONVOY REACHED ICELAND ~ AND FLEMING, HIS JOB FINISHED, WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO WENT ASHORE ...

I CAN SEE YOU'RE SORRY TO LEAVE HER, MISTER FLEMING! SHIPS CAN GET A HOLD OF ONE ...

THAT'S TRUE, MISTER MATE, BUT IT'S NOT THE LIFE FOR ME! WE CAN AT LEAST HIT BACK ~ YOU HAVE TO SIT IN A THIN IRON HULL, WAITING FOR THE BLOW TO COME.

THERE WAS A VACANT SEAT IN A DAKOTA FLYING TO BRITAIN THAT NIGHT, AND FLEMING GOT IT ... BUT HIS THOUGHTS WERE SOMBRE ...

IF ONLY IT WAS AS EASY TO BLOT OUT THE MEMORY OF THAT VOICE CALLING FOR HELP AS IT WAS TO SWITCH OFF THE RADIO RECEIVER.

BACK IN BRITAIN, FLEMING WAS GIVEN A FEW DAYS WELL-EARNED LEAVE ~ AND HE WENT IMMEDIATELY TO THE AIR MINISTRY FOR NEWS OF WHEN HIS FATHER WOULD BE LIKELY TO ARRIVE ON THE TRANSATLANTIC FERRY SERVICE.

NOW LET ME SEE ... SQUADRON LEADER FLEMING ... OH! I'M AFRAID I'VE GOT BAD NEWS, VERY BAD NEWS--!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

SQUADRON LEADER FLEMING HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING OVER THE NORTH ATLANTIC FOUR DAYS AGO. OUR MONITORS PICKED UP FAINT RADIO SIGNALS. THE LANCASTER HE WAS FERRRYING WAS APPARENTLY ATTACKED BY HEINKELS ..

OH, NO! NO,
IT CAN'T BE!



WHITE-FACED, AND WITH UNSEEING EYES, FLEMING TURNED ON HIS HEEL, AND WALKED FROM THE ROOM ...

MY OWN FATHER!
IT COULD HAVE BEEN ANYBODY, ANY MAN OUT OF THOUSANDS OF AIRCREW -- BUT IT HAD TO BE

MY OWN FATHER!
AND I COOLLY SWITCHED OFF THE R.T. AND DITCHED THE ONLY FIGHTER THAT COULD HAVE SAVED HIM

FLEMING!
WAIT ..



Chapter 3. CONTEMPT FOR DEATH

THAT DAY, DONALD FLEMING WALKED FAR THROUGH LONDON ~ STREET AFTER STREET, MILE AFTER MILE, MIXING WITH THE CROWDS, YET SEEING NOTHING OF THEM. BUT WALK THOUGH HE MIGHT, HE COULD NOT ESCAPE FROM HIS THOUGHTS ~ FOR HE, AND HE ALONE, COULD HAVE SAVED HIS FATHER'S LIFE.

...I SWITCHED OFF THE R.T. ... / SWITCHED IT OFF! IF I HAD EVEN SAID A FEW WORDS ~ ASKED HIS NAME ~ THEN I WOULD HAVE KNOWN. I COULD HAVE GOT TO THE LANCASTER IN TIME ~ EASILY...



IT WAS DUSK WHEN HE GOT BACK TO THE AIR MINISTRY ~ AND HE WENT STRAIGHT TO THE OFFICE OF GROUP CAPTAIN JIMMY CHARRINGTON, HIS FATHER'S GREATEST FRIEND, THE MAN WHO HAD FLOWN WITH HIS FATHER IN THE FIRST WAR, AND HELPED HIM GET INTO THE SECOND ...



Broken Wings

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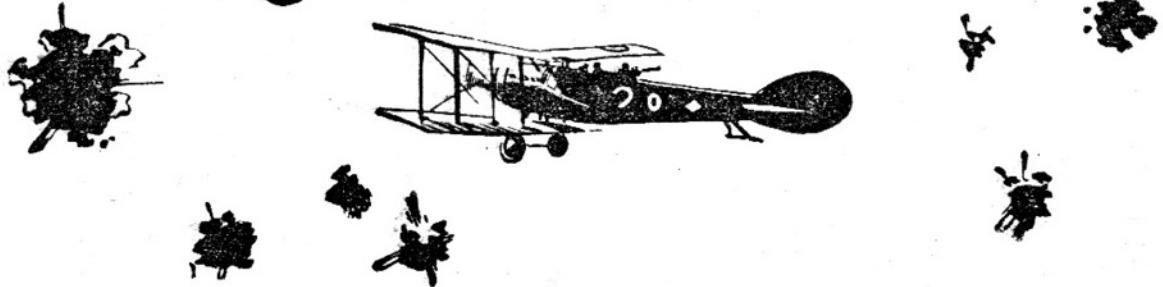
BITTERLY, FLEMING TOLD HIS STORY,
LEAVING NOTHING OUT ...

I DID MY DUTY -- THAT'S HOW
IT WILL GO DOWN IN THE
RECORDS -- BUT HOW DO YOU
THINK I FEEL! I FLUNG MY
FATHER TO THE
WOLVES AND WENT
AFTER A SUBMARINE
THAT WOULD PROBABLY
HAVE FOUNDED
ANYWAY!

I'M NOT GOING TO JUDGE
YOU, DONALD ... I'M NOT GOING
TO AGREE, OR DISAGREE! I'M
SIMPLY GOING TO TELL YOU A
STORY -- AND I WANT YOU
TO LISTEN CAREFULLY ...

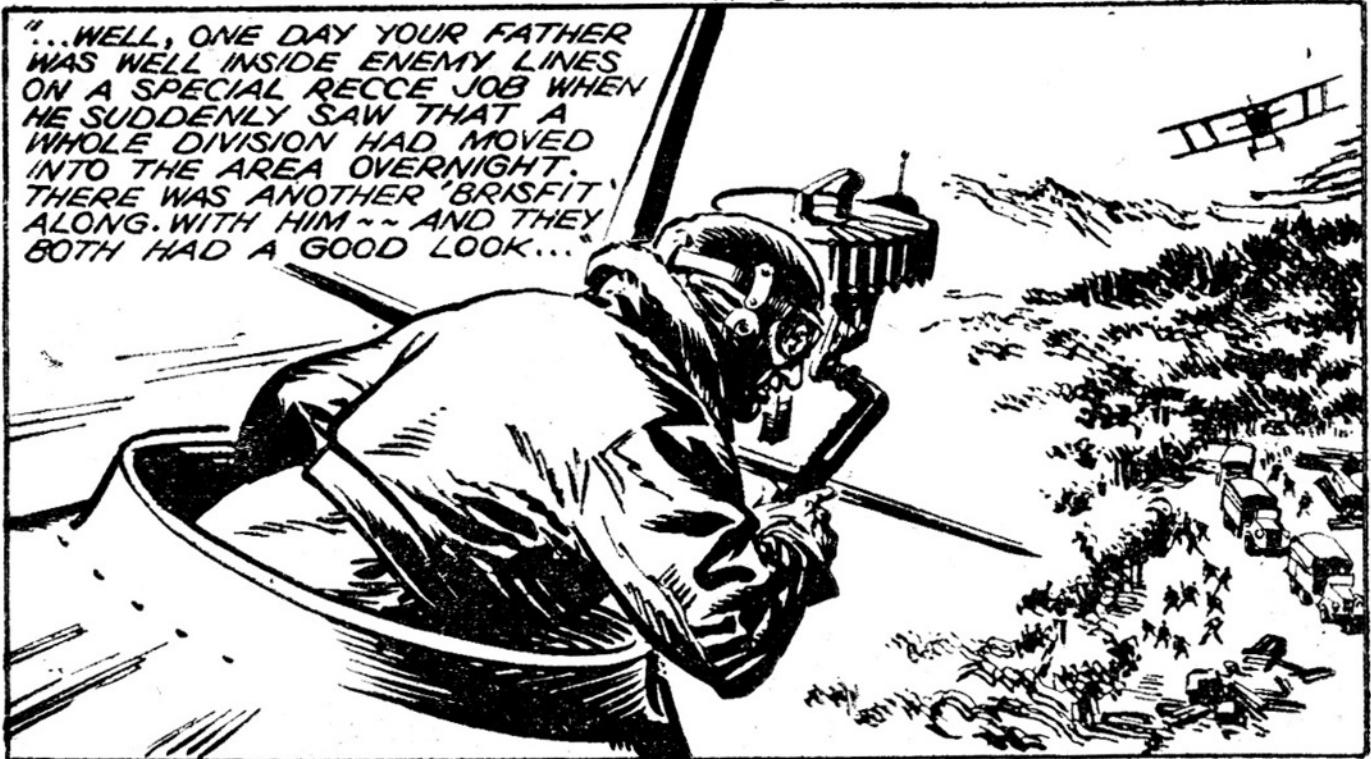


* IN 1918, YOUR FATHER AND I WERE FIGHTER PILOTS
ON THE WESTERN FRONT. WE WERE ON BRISTOL
FIGHTERS -- FLYING RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS FAR
BEHIND THE GERMAN LINES. BELIEVE ME, IT WAS A
DICEY BUSINESS -- THERE WERE SEVERAL CIRCUSES OF
FOKKER D.7S IN THE AREA, AND IF WE HAD BEEN
JUMPED ON, WE WOULDN'T HAVE HAD A CHANCE ...

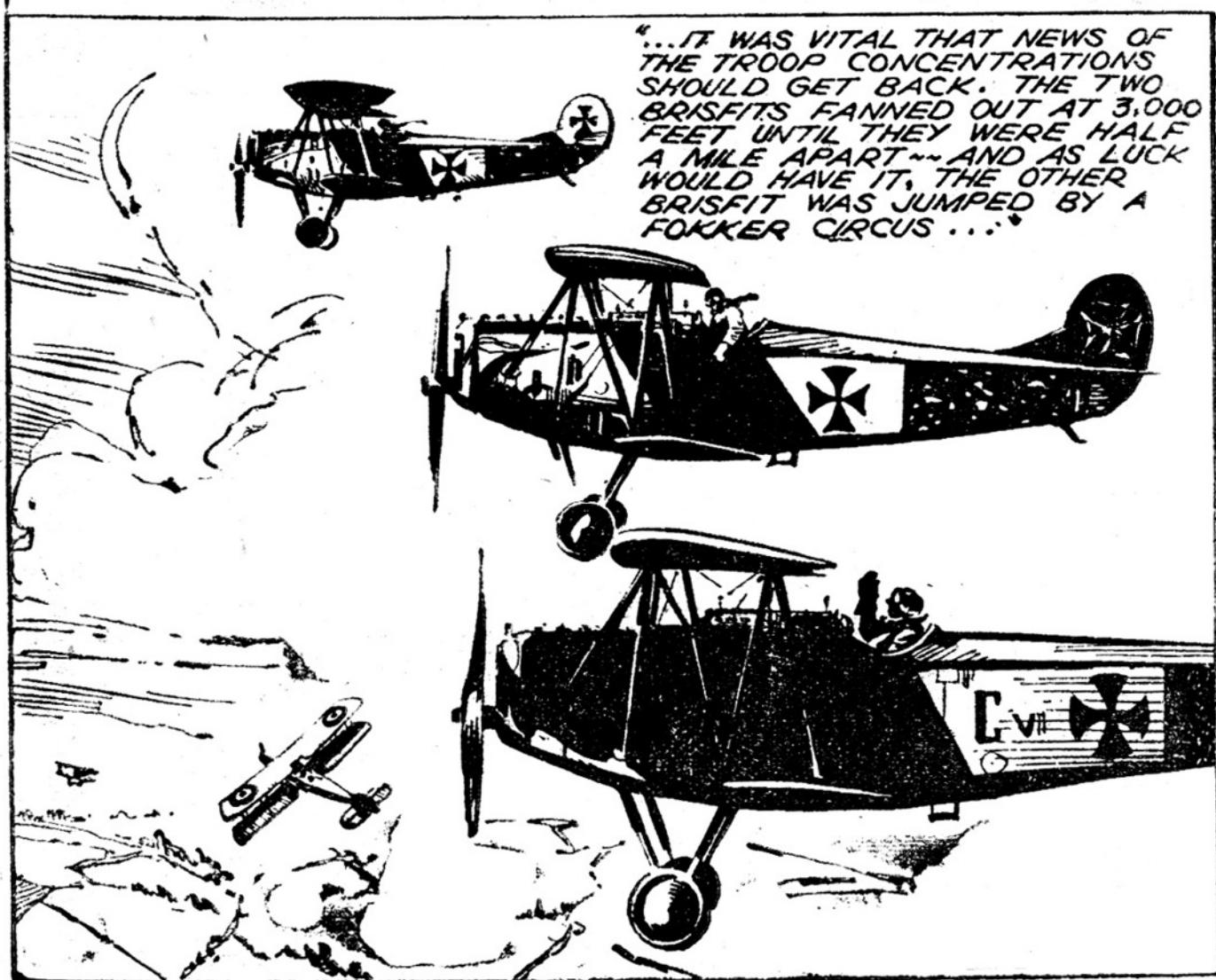


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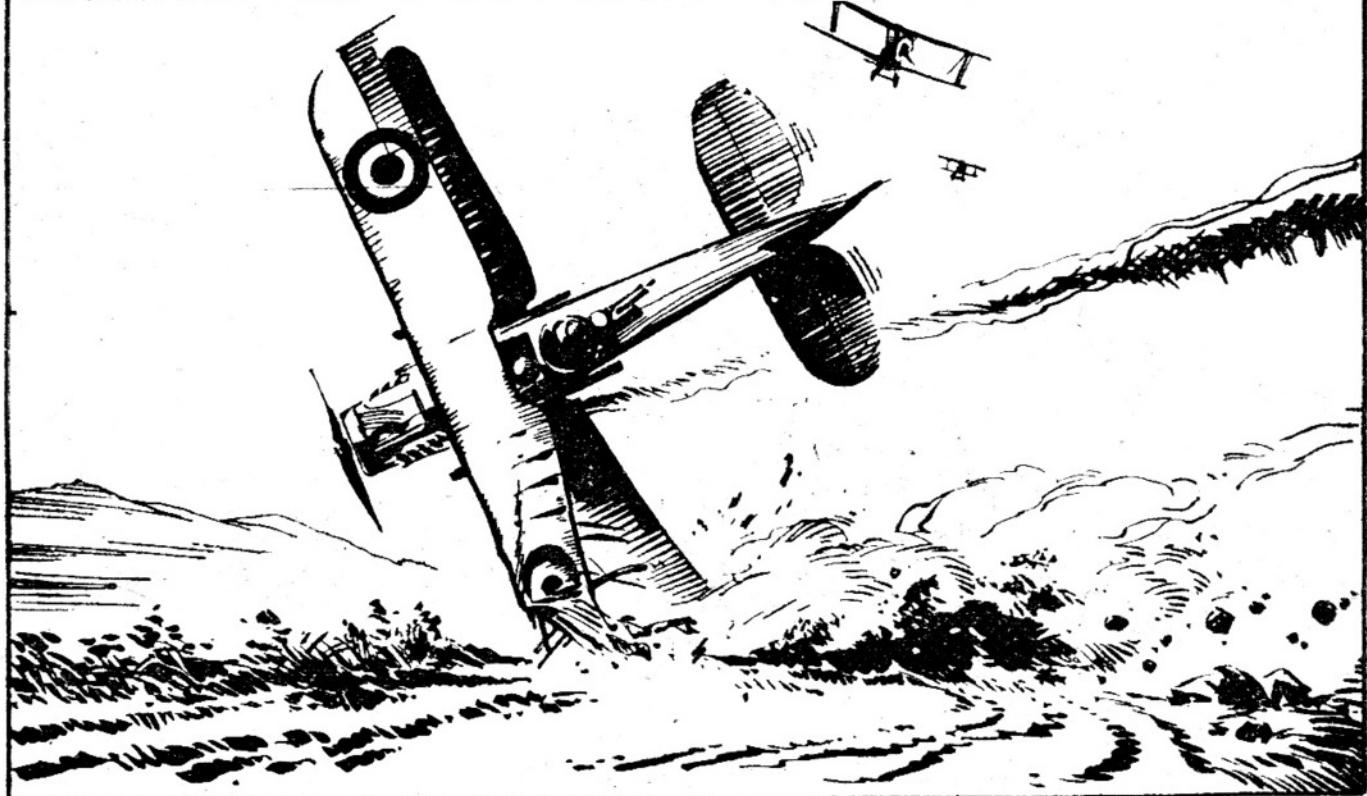
"...WELL, ONE DAY YOUR FATHER WAS WELL INSIDE ENEMY LINES ON A SPECIAL RECCE JOB WHEN HE SUDDENLY SAW THAT A WHOLE DIVISION HAD MOVED INTO THE AREA OVERNIGHT. THERE WAS ANOTHER 'BRISFIT' ALONG WITH HIM ~ AND THEY BOTH HAD A GOOD LOOK..."



"...IT WAS VITAL THAT NEWS OF THE TROOP CONCENTRATIONS SHOULD GET BACK. THE TWO BRISFITS FANNED OUT AT 3,000 FEET UNTIL THEY WERE HALF A MILE APART ~ AND AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, THE OTHER BRISFIT WAS JUMPED BY A FOKKER CIRCUS ..."

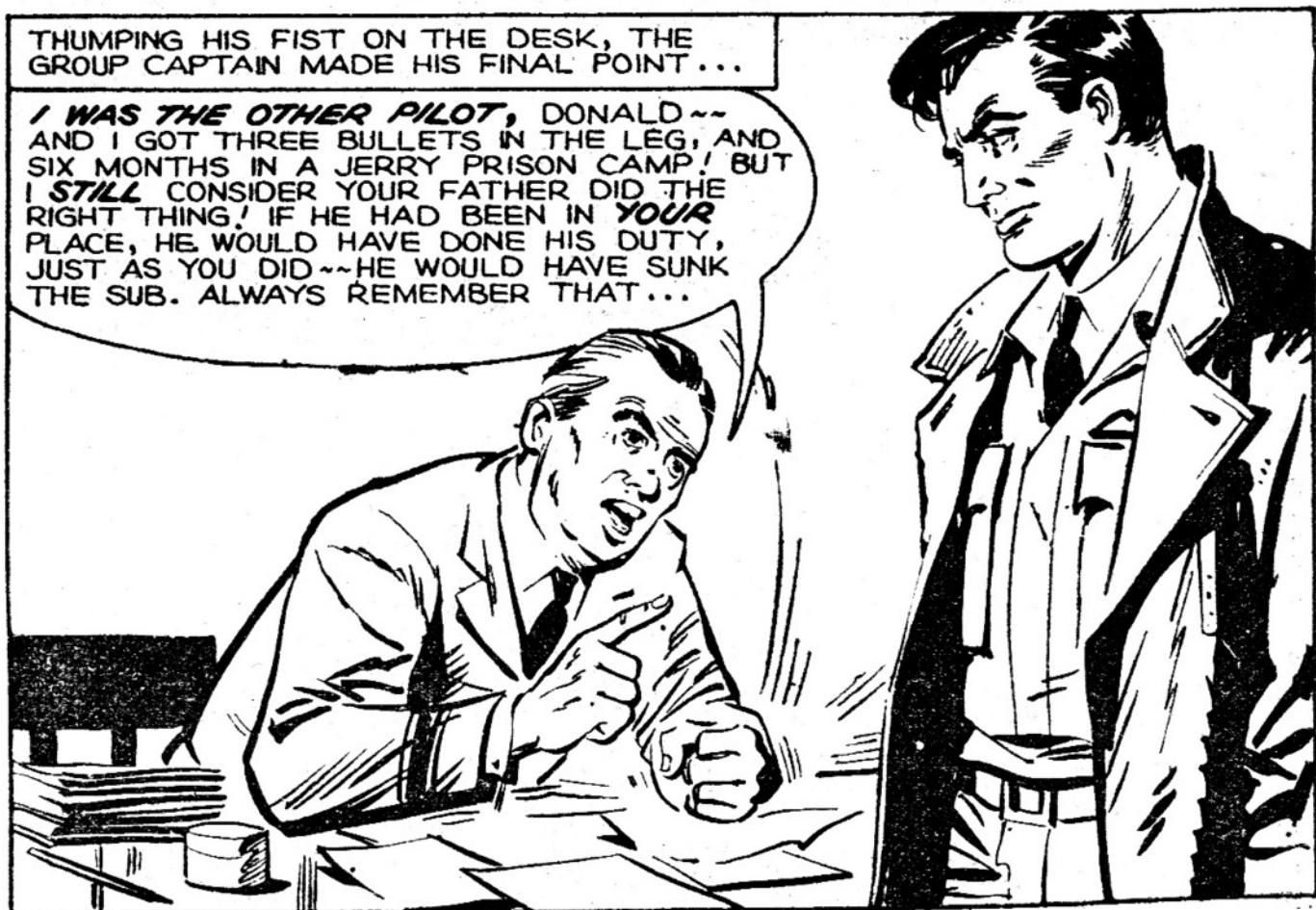


"...BUT YOUR FATHER DID NOT GO TO THE OTHER BRISTOL FIGHTER'S HELP! HE KNEW THAT THE INFORMATION HE HELD WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LIFE OF THE OTHER PILOT. ALTHOUGH THAT OTHER PILOT WAS HIS CLOSEST FRIEND."



THUMPING HIS FIST ON THE DESK, THE GROUP CAPTAIN MADE HIS FINAL POINT...

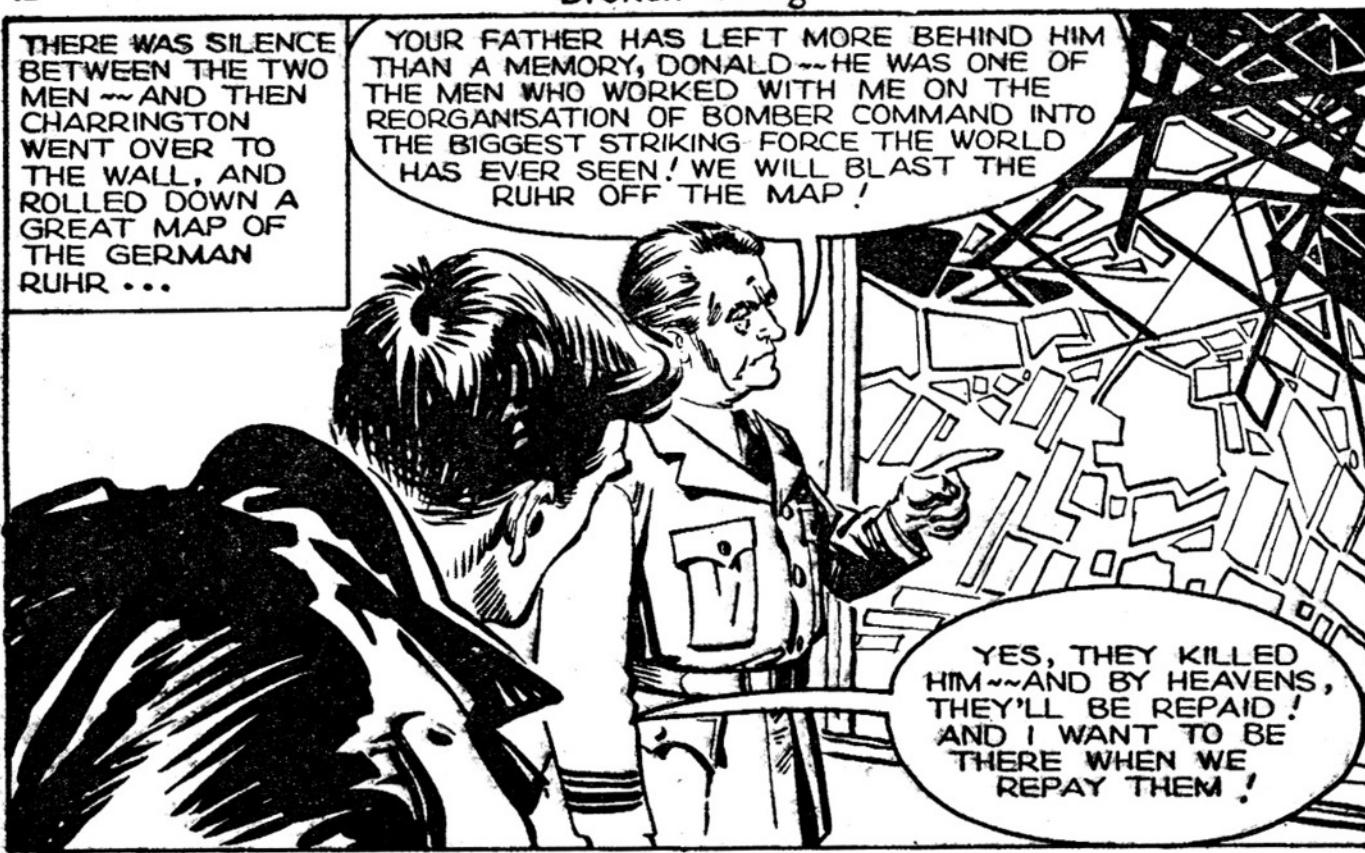
I WAS THE OTHER PILOT, DONALD-- AND I GOT THREE BULLETS IN THE LEG, AND SIX MONTHS IN A JERRY PRISON CAMP! BUT I STILL CONSIDER YOUR FATHER DID THE RIGHT THING! IF HE HAD BEEN IN YOUR PLACE, HE WOULD HAVE DONE HIS DUTY, JUST AS YOU DID--HE WOULD HAVE SUNK THE SUB. ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT...



Broken Wings

THERE WAS SILENCE BETWEEN THE TWO MEN ~ AND THEN CHARRINGTON WENT OVER TO THE WALL, AND ROLLED DOWN A GREAT MAP OF THE GERMAN RUHR ...

YOUR FATHER HAS LEFT MORE BEHIND HIM THAN A MEMORY, DONALD ~ HE WAS ONE OF THE MEN WHO WORKED WITH ME ON THE REORGANISATION OF BOMBER COMMAND INTO THE BIGGEST STRIKING FORCE THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN! WE WILL BLAST THE RUHR OFF THE MAP!



YES, THEY KILLED HIM ~ AND BY HEAVENS, THEY'LL BE REPAYED! AND I WANT TO BE THERE WHEN WE REPAY THEM!



MY FATHER WAS IN ON THIS, SIR, AT THE PLANNING END ~ AND I WANT TO BE IN ON IT AT THE WORKING END! I HOPE YOU WON'T REFUSE ME!

NO, DONALD, I WON'T REFUSE YOU. THE NEW SQUADRONS ARE JUST BEING FORMED ~ AND WE'RE LOOKING FOR THE BEST FIGHTER MEN WE CAN GET AS PATHFINDERS...

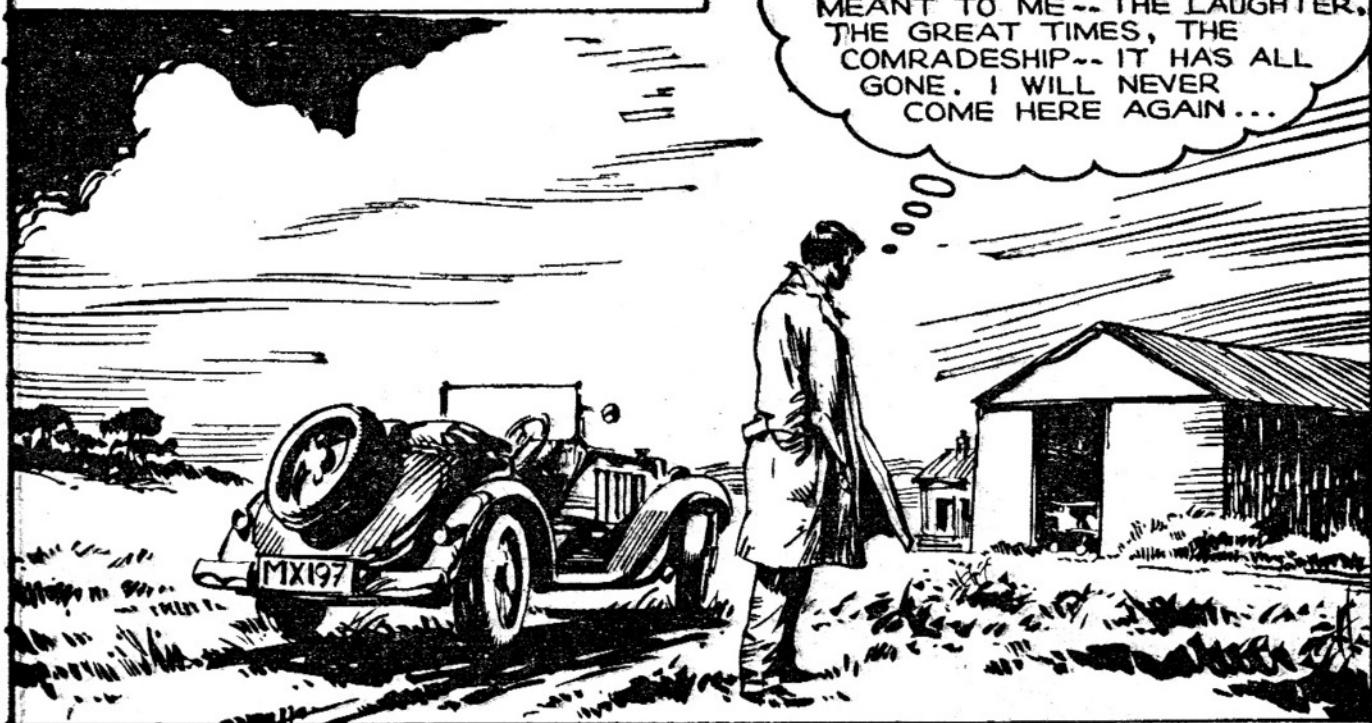
NEXT DAY, FLEMING DROVE OUT OF LONDON INTO KENT, TO THE LITTLE PRIVATE AIRFIELD WHERE HIS FATHER HAD FIRST TAUGHT HIM TO FLY ...



IT WAS IN THIS MACHINE THAT HE AND I FLEW HIGH IN THE SUNLIGHT, ONLY TWO YEARS AGO ... AND NOW IT WILL LIE HERE AND ROT ~ FOR HE WILL NEVER COME BACK ...

TOO SMALL FOR WARTIME FLYING, THE AIRFIELD ITSELF HAD REMAINED UNUSED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR.

THIS IS THE END OF A PART OF MY LIFE ~ THIS PLACE, AND EVERYTHING IT MEANT TO ME ~ THE LAUGHTER. THE GREAT TIMES, THE COMRADESHIP ~ IT HAS ALL GONE. I WILL NEVER COME HERE AGAIN...



AND SO FLEMING WENT ON TO JOIN THE FIRST OF THE "PATHFINDER" SQUADRONS WHERE HE WAS TO LEARN THAT THE LAUGHTER, THE GREAT TIMES, AND THE COMRADESHIP HAD NOT GONE FROM HIS LIFE, BUT WERE TO COME UP AGAIN, WITH OTHERS, IN DIFFERENT PLACES.



Broken Wings

THE MOSQUITO HAD JUST BEEN INTRODUCED INTO SERVICE AND THE INSTRUCTORS WERE VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT IT...

I MUST WARN YOU, FLEMING ... THIS AIRCRAFT IS QUITE REMARKABLE! ITS AIRFRAME IS MADE OF PLYWOOD -- AND THE POWER UNITS ARE MERLIN ENGINES! WORK IT OUT FOR YOURSELF

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER YOU'RE TRYING TO SCARE ME, OR ENCOURAGE ME!



AFTER THIRTY HOURS OF CONVERSION FLYING, FLEMING COULD HANDLE THE MOSQUITO IN THE MANNER BORN ...

JUST GET A LOAD OF THAT!

A LANCASTER ! THOSE ARE THE BOYS WHO WILL DROP THEIR LOADS ON TOP OF OUR MARKER FLARES ! MY FATHER ONCE PILOTED ONE ...



Broken Wings

IT WAS A PRACTICE RUN OVER THE SCOTTISH MOORS ~ CARRIED OUT WITH GRIM SERIOUSNESS. THE SKILL THEY DEVELOPED NOW WOULD CARRY THEM THROUGH GERMAN SKIES TO THE REAL TARGET IN MONTHS TO COME ...

STEADY...
STEADY...
HOLD IT...

RED MARKER
AWAY!

IT WAS ON ONE OF HIS FINAL RECONNAISSANCES OVER ENEMY TERRITORY THAT FLEMING SUDDENLY REVEALED TO HIS NAVIGATOR THE IRON THAT WAS IN HIS SOUL.

HOW ARE WE
DOING NOW,
NAVIGATOR?

I THINK THIS
IS JUST
ABOUT IT...



FIGHTER,
FIGHTER,
NINE O'CLOCK!
SCATTER
AND RUN!

THE RULING ON THIS FLIGHT WAS "RUN FROM THE ENEMY" ~ FOR THE PATHFINDER CREWS WERE TOO VALUABLE TO BE SACRIFICED NEEDLESSLY IN PRESSING HOME ON A MERE TRAINING OBJECTIVE. BUT FLEMING HAD OTHER VIEWS ...

YOU HEARD WHAT THE
MAN SAID ~ LET'S GET
OUT OF HERE!

NOT US, OPPO!
WE'RE ALMOST THERE ~
SO WE'RE GOING IN!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE PATHFINDERS' JOB WAS ITS **ACCURACY**. THE BOMBER FORCE WOULD DROP THEIR LOADS ON THE MARKER FLARES ~ SO THE MARKERS HAD TO BE DEAD ON THE TARGET.

OUR FIRST GREAT TARGET IS TO BE COLOGNE. WE HAVE GOT TO KNOW THIS MAP SO WELL THAT WE CAN GO IN OVER GERMANY IN DARKNESS AND DROP OUR FLARES BANG ON THE TARGET AREAS !



FLEMING AND HIS NAVIGATOR WERE AMONG THE MANY CREWS THAT PRACTISED THE PLOTTING AND FLARE-DROPPING TECHNIQUES INCESSANTLY OVER HOME TERRITORY ...

OKAY.
NAVIGATOR ~~
WHERE ARE
WE NOW ?

IN TEN SECONDS FROM
NOW, CORRECT HALF A
DEGREE TO COURSE O-SIX-ONE!
THEN WE OUGHT TO BE OVER
TARGET AREA IN FOUR
MINUTES ~ I'LL GIVE YOU
YOUR TIMING ...



Broken Wings

THEY WERE OVER BUCKEBURG, A SMALL TOWN IN WESTPHALIA. PUSHING THE STICK FORWARD, FLEMING DROPPED THROUGH THE CLOUD LAYER ...



WE CAME TO GET PICTURES ~ SO WE'RE GOING TO GET THEM ! THE DAY HAS YET TO COME WHEN I RUN FROM A JERRY FIGHTER ...

OKAY, OKAY... YOU HAVE THE STICK... I CAN'T ARGUE !

THEY LEVELLED OUT OVER BUCKEBURG. ROCKETING ACROSS THE DARK MASS OF THE SLEEPING TOWN, THE MOSQUITO SWERVED VIOLENTLY AS FLEMING PULLED HER INTO A TIGHT TURN ...

THERE'S YOUR PINPOINT, NAVIGATOR— THE TOWN HALL !



FOR PETE'S SAKE, FLEMING, CUT AND RUN ! THERE ARE FIGHTERS AROUND ~ THIS IS DICING WITH DEATH !

AND THEN ...

FIGHTER!

FULL
THROTTLE, THROUGH
THE GATE!

Broken Wings

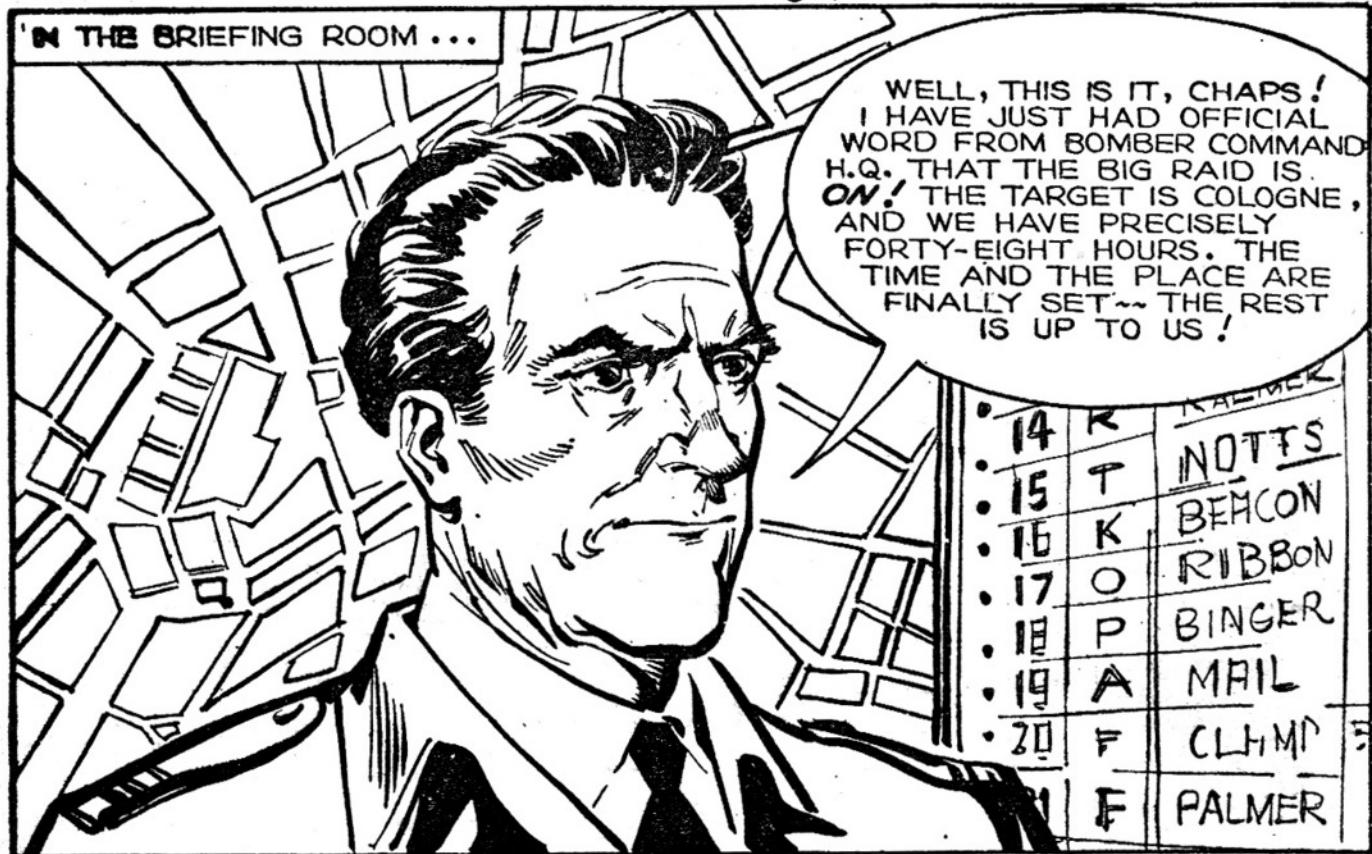
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WITH PHENOMENAL ACCELERATION, THE MOSQUITO LEAPED AWAY ~ AND SUCH WAS THE POWER OF ITS ENGINES THAT IT WAS OUT OF CANNON-RANGE WITHIN SECONDS. THE ONLY SIGNS OF ITS NEAR ESCAPE WERE THE OMINOUS LACERATIONS IN THE STARBOARD WING ...



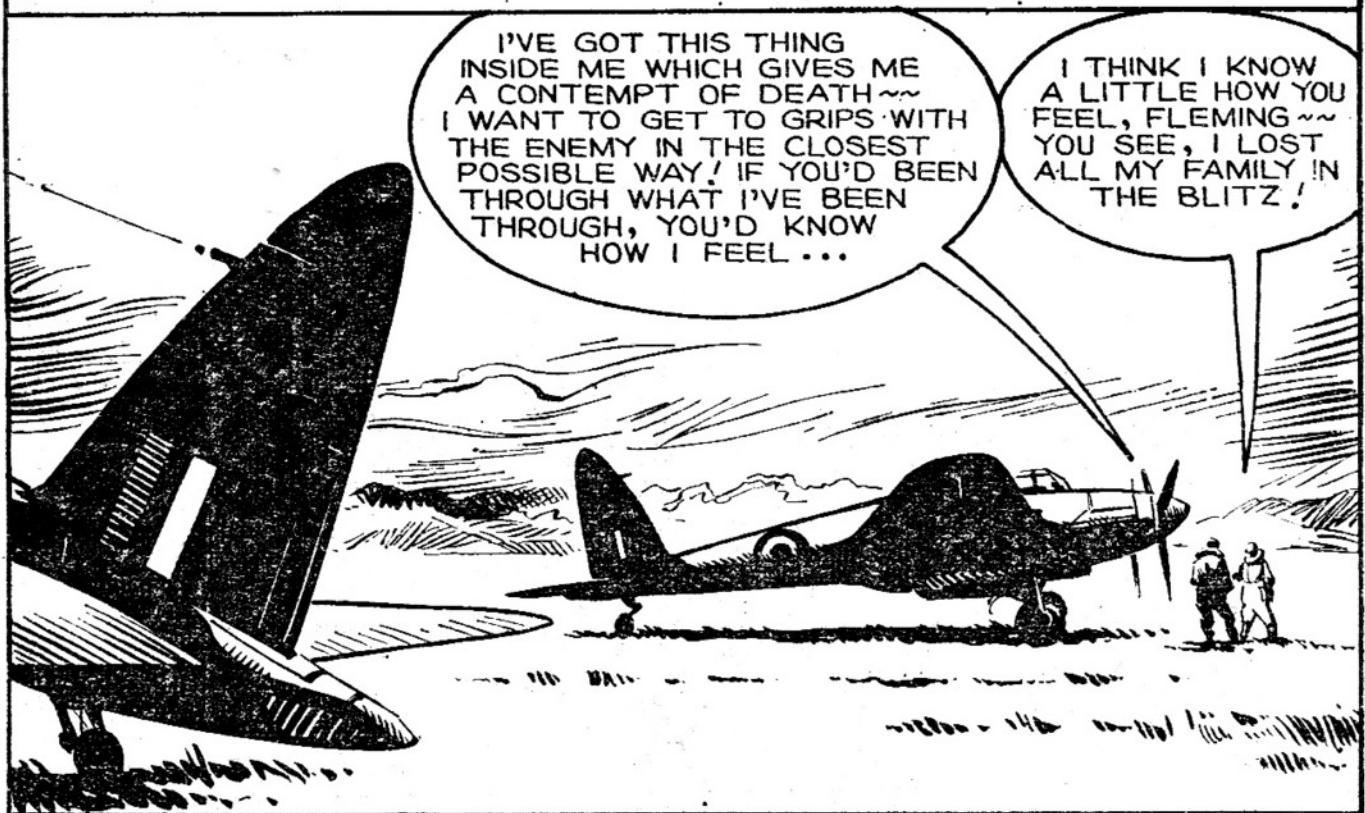
Broken Wings





Broken Wings

FLEMING BEGAN TO TELL PETERS SLOWLY AND BITTERLY OF THE DRAMA IN MID-ATLANTIC AND HOW HE HAD BEEN THE ONLY MAN WHO COULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING TO SAVE HIS FATHER ~~ AND HAD FAILED ...



Chapter 4. LONE PATHFINDER

ON THAT FATEFUL MAY EVENING, A THOUSAND BOMBERS WERE SITTING ON BRITISH AIRFIELDS, LANDED WITH EXPLOSIVES AND INCENDIARIES. WITHOUT THE PATHFINDERS THE SKIES OVER THE ENEMY CITY WOULD HAVE BEEN A BLACK CHAOS ...



WHEN THE PATHFINDERS ASSEMBLED FOR THEIR FINAL BRIEFING, MUCH OF THE GREAT BOMBER FORCE WAS ALREADY AIRBORNE, AND HEADING FOR ITS RENDEZVOUS ON THE EAST COAST OF ENGLAND.

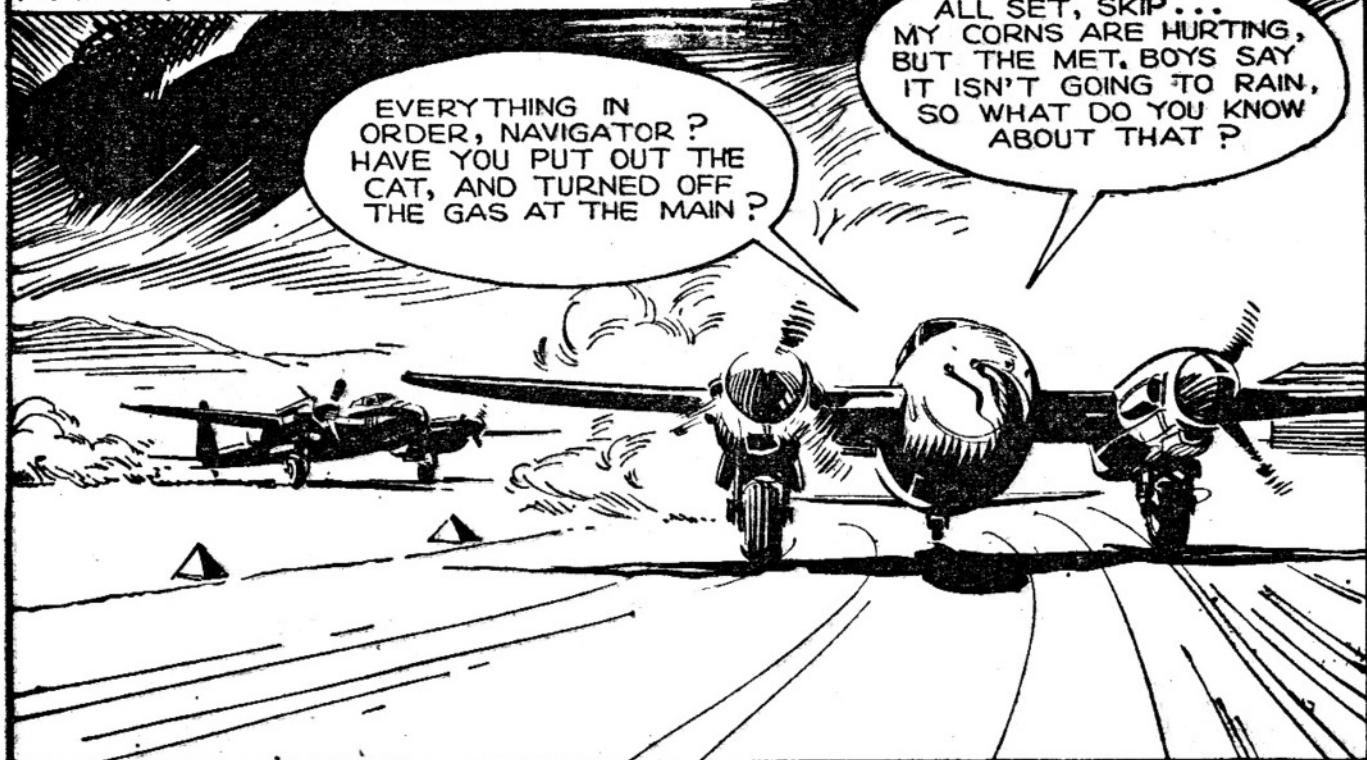


Broken Wings

IT WAS DUSK WHEN FLEMING TAXIED ROUND THE PERIMETER TO TAKE-OFF POINT. HE MADE HIS LAST CHECK ...

EVERYTHING IN ORDER, NAVIGATOR ? HAVE YOU PUT OUT THE CAT, AND TURNED OFF THE GAS AT THE MAIN ?

ALL SET, SKIP... MY CORNS ARE HURTING, BUT THE MET. BOYS SAY IT ISN'T GOING TO RAIN, SO WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT ?



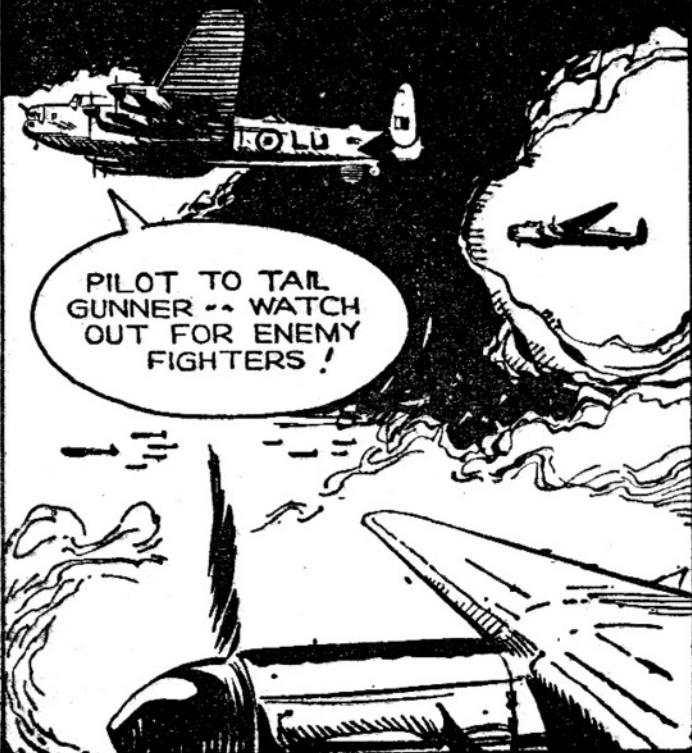
THEN THEIR TURN CAME, AND THEY WERE HURTLING UP INTO THE NIGHT SKY ...

CHECK YOUR OXYGEN -- WE'RE GOING TO NEED IT !



FAR OUT ACROSS THE NORTH SEA, THE MIGHTY BOMBER FORCE WAS ALREADY HALF-WAY TOWARDS GERMANY, FLYING IN DROVES AND LOOSE FORMATIONS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS.

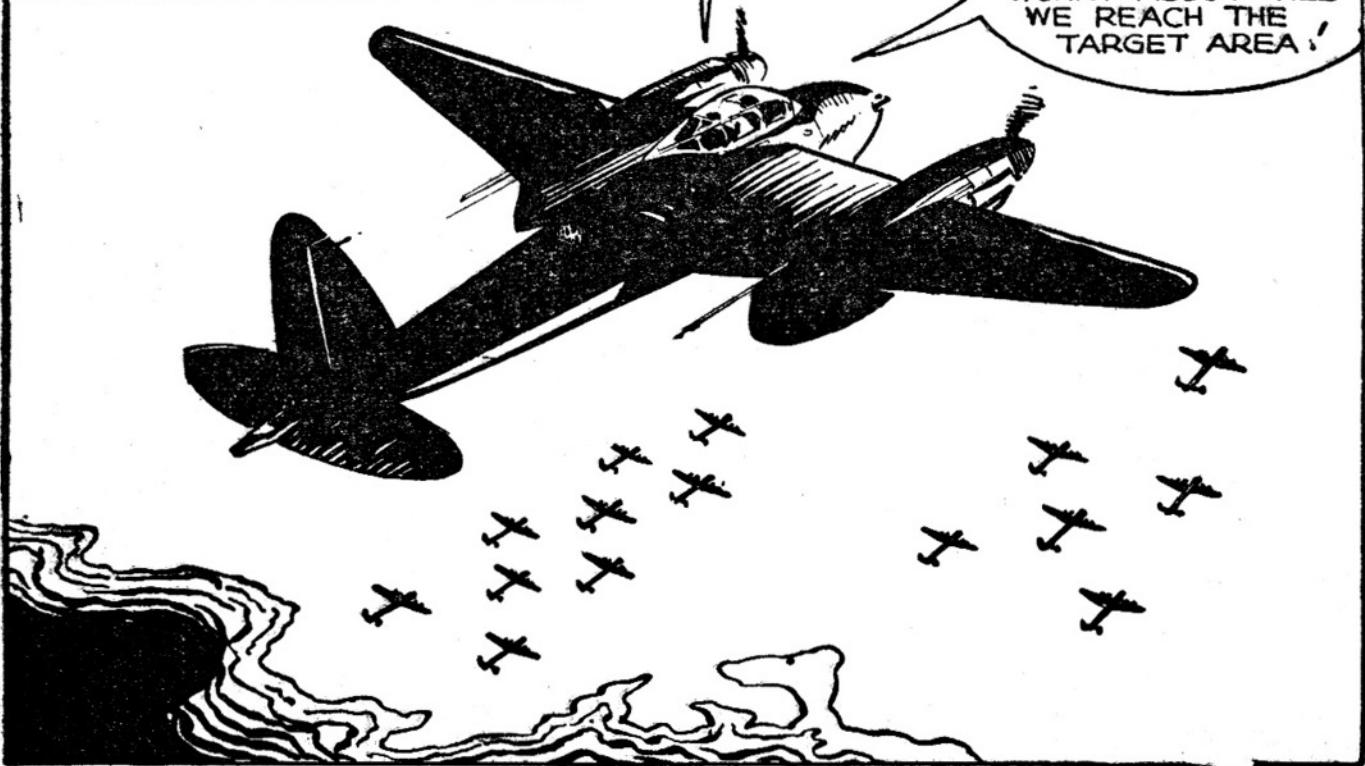
PILOT TO TAIL GUNNER -- WATCH OUT FOR ENEMY FIGHTERS !



THE HIGHEST BOMBER FORMATIONS WERE AT 20,000 FEET ~ AND AS THEY REACHED THE GERMAN COAST, THE PATHFINDERS OVERTOOK THEM HIGHER STILL AT 25,000 FEET ...

THERE THEY GO, SKIP ~ THE BOYS IN BLUE !

THIS IS JUST ABOUT WHERE THEY'LL MEET THE NIGHT-FIGHTERS ~ THAT'S ONE THING WE WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT TILL WE REACH THE TARGET AREA !



AS THEY FLEW ON AND ON, FLEMING BROODED ON THE CHAIN OF EVENTS THAT HAD BROUGHT HIM INTO THE SPEARHEAD OF THE GREATEST AIR RAID IN HISTORY ...

YOU KNOW, NAVIGATOR, I WOULD HAVE GIVEN ANYTHING FOR MY FATHER TO BE HERE TO SEE THIS SHOW !

HE'S HERE IN SPIRIT, SKIP ~ YOU'RE DEPUTISING FOR HIM !



IN THE EERIE LIGHT OF THE MOSQUITO COCKPIT, THE NAVIGATOR HAD BEEN CROSS-CHECKING ON HIS COURSE - PLOTTING ~~ AND NOW HE TAPPED FLEMING ON THE SHOULDER ...

THERE IT IS,
SKIP ~~ I MAKE
US OVER THE
TARGET AREA!

THEN DOWN WE GO ~~
KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR
TIMING, AND GIVE ME A
SHOUT! I'M WATCHING
FOR NIGHT-FIGHTERS!

IT WAS COLOGNE, ALL RIGHT ~~ AND AS THE LITTLE PATHFINDER AIRCRAFT HURTLED DOWN THROUGH THE ABYSS, THE DIM EXPANSE OF THE VAST BLACKED-OUT CITY GREW CLEAR. SUDDENLY, A TRAIN OF EXPLODING FLASHES SHOT ACROSS THE DARKNESS ...

FLAK! THEY'RE ON
TO US! I MAKE IT...
TWO MINUTES THIRTY
SECONDS TO GO!

BY HEAVENS, AND
WE'RE GOING TO MAKE
A BONFIRE OUT OF
THEM ~~ **WHAT A**
BONFIRE!

THEN SEARCHLIGHTS WERE STABBING INTO THE SKY, IN GREAT MULTIPLE CONES. DROPPING TO 5,000 FEET, FLEMING BROUGHT THE MOSQUITO ROUND FOR ITS RUN-IN ...

TIME!
GIVE ME COURSE
0-EIGHT-FIVE,
AND HOLD HER
STEADY!

O-EIGHT-FIVE,
IT IS!



THE PATHFINDERS SWUNG ON TO THEIR COURSES, AND ROCKETED IN ON STRAIGHT AND LEVEL PATHS. ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE FIRST MARKERS BURST INTO LIFE, AND MUSHROOMS OF FLARING RED PHOSPHORESCENCE CASCADED DOWN TO SETTLE IN THE TARGET AREAS IN VAST PATCHES.

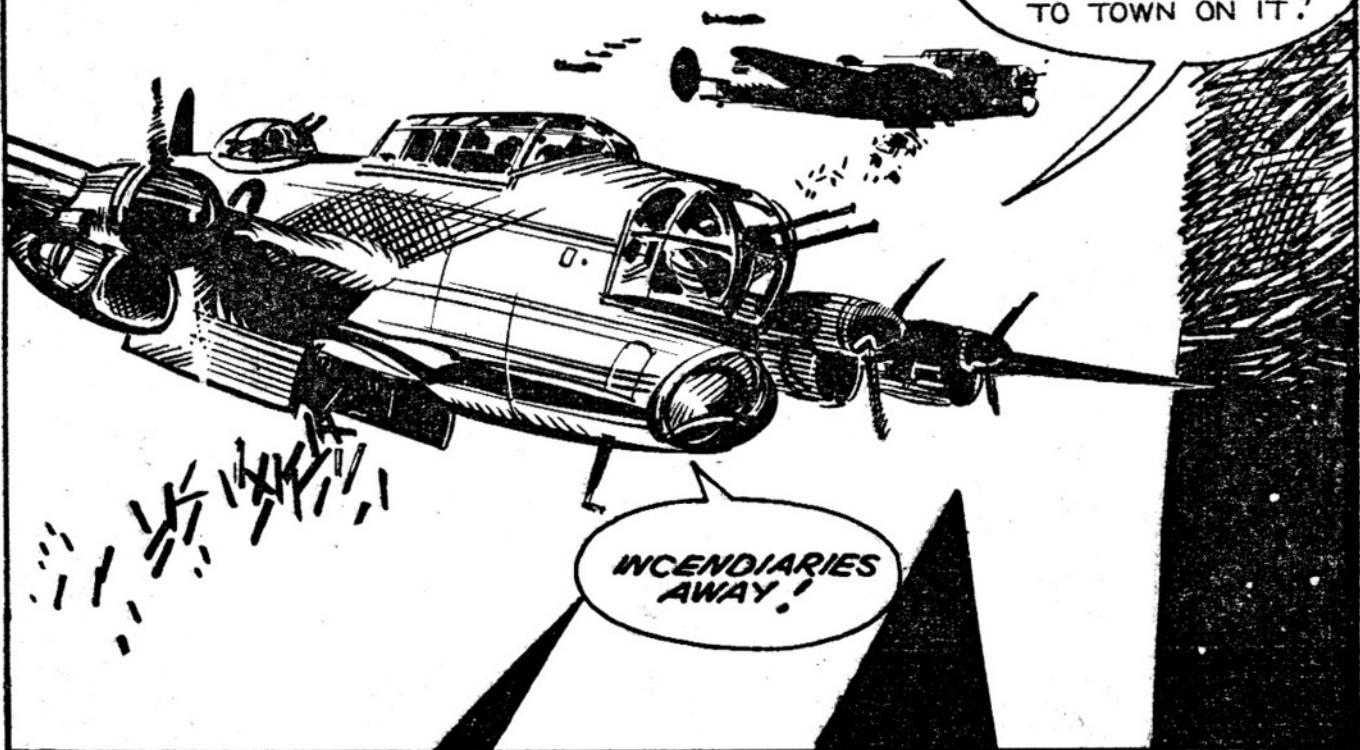
SPOT ON!
THE GREENS SHOULD BE COMING IN!



Broken Wings

THEN THE GREEN MARKERS WERE CASCADING DOWN TO MARK THE BOUNDARY OF THE TARGET AREA AROUND THE REDS ... AND THE FIRST MIGHTY WAVE OF BOMBERS CAME HOMING IN

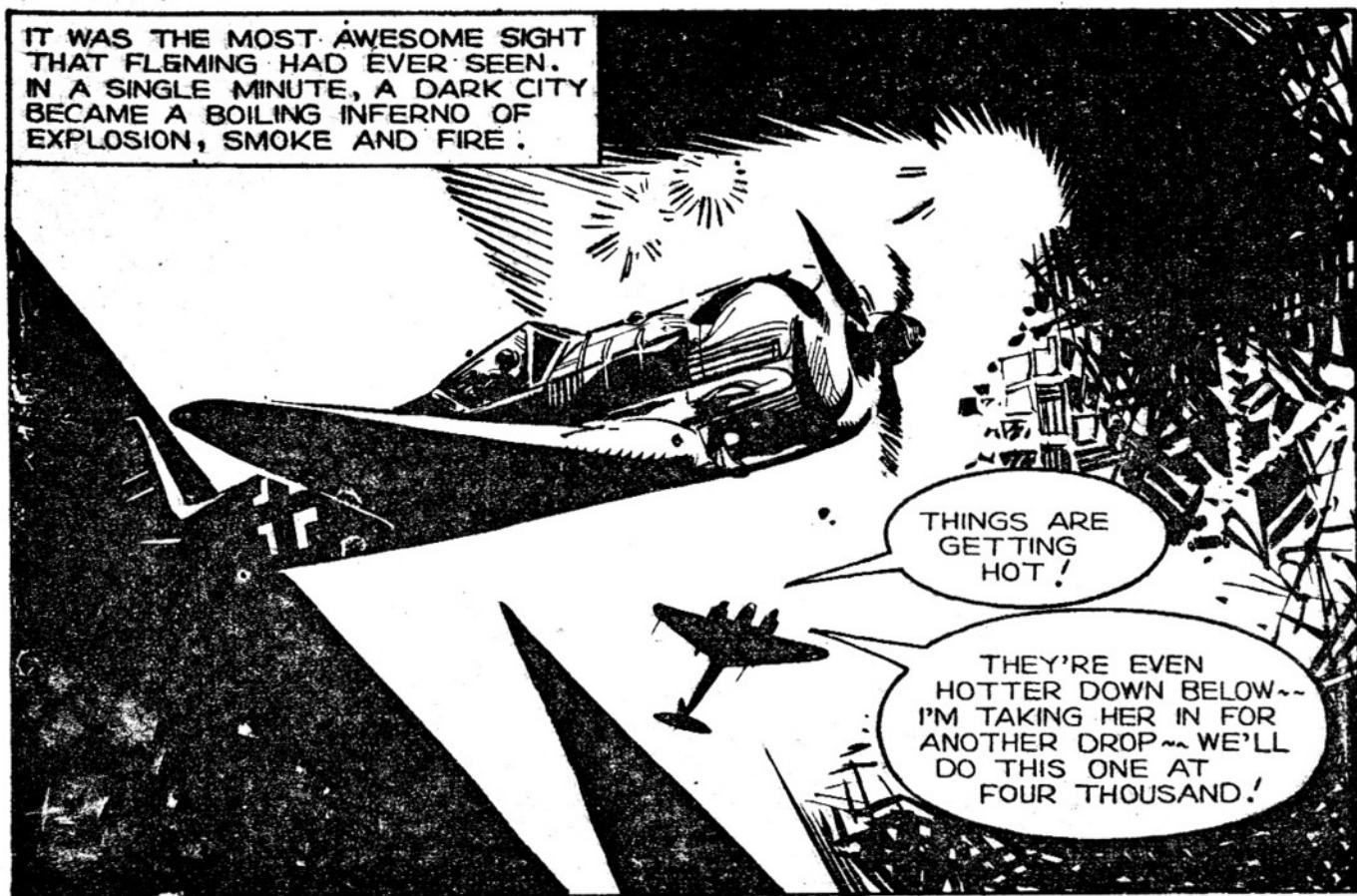
THIS PLACE LOOKS LIKE A FAIRGROUND -- THE PATHFINDERS HAVE BEEN GOING TO TOWN ON IT!



IT WAS THE MOST AWESOME SIGHT THAT FLEMING HAD EVER SEEN. IN A SINGLE MINUTE, A DARK CITY BECAME A BOILING INFERNO OF EXPLOSION, SMOKE AND FIRE.

THINGS ARE GETTING HOT!

THEY'RE EVEN HOTTER DOWN BELOW -- I'M TAKING HER IN FOR ANOTHER DROP -- WE'LL DO THIS ONE AT FOUR THOUSAND!



FLEMING NEVER EVEN SAW THE NIGHT - FIGHTER THAT GOT THEM -- FOR IT STREAKED IN FROM ABOVE, AND RAKED THE MOSQUITO WITH CANNON SHELLS FROM NOSE TO TAIL !



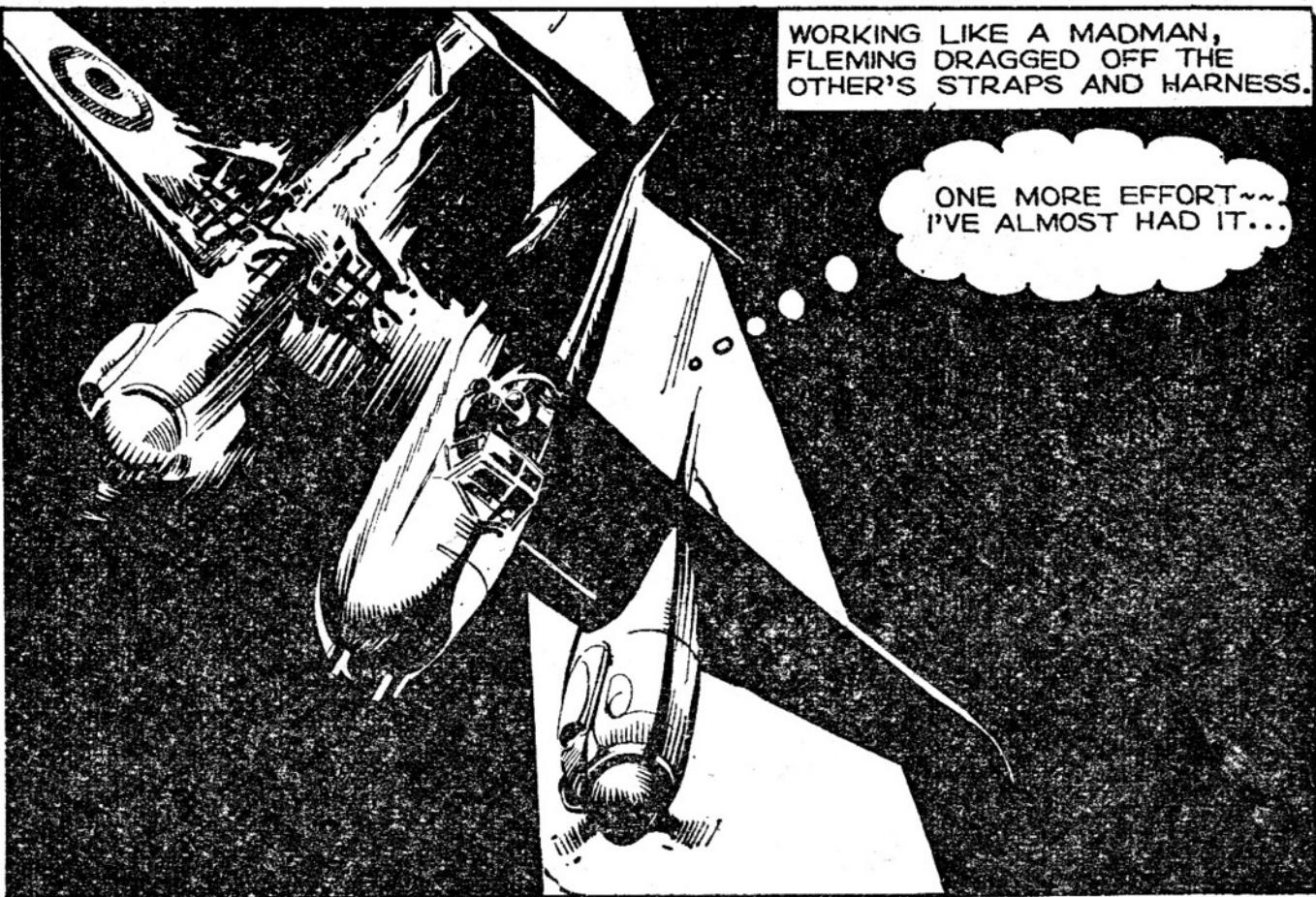
Broken Wings

BLOOD STREAMING FROM HIS SHATTERED LEG, FLEMING SAW THAT CABIN AND CONTROLS WERE A SHAMBLES ~ HIS NAVIGATOR HUNG LIMPLY IN HIS HARNESS ...



WORKING LIKE A MADMAN,
FLEMING DRAGGED OFF THE
OTHER'S STRAPS AND HARNESS.

ONE MORE EFFORT~~.
I'VE ALMOST HAD IT...



AS THE STRICKEN MACHINE STALLED AND LURCHED OVER, FLEMING PUNCHED THE EMERGENCY HOOD RELEASE ~~ AND THEY WERE FLUNG OUT VIOLENTLY, AND FELL HEADLONG THROUGH THE WINDY DARKNESS ...

YOUR RIPCORD,
PETERS ~~ WHERE'S
YOUR RIPCORD?



HE FOUND THE UNCONSCIOUS NAVIGATOR'S RIPCORD... THE MAN'S CHUTE BILLDED OUT AND FLEMING FELL CLEAR, PULLING AT HIS OWN RIPCORD HANDLE AS HE DID SO....

AT LEAST
PETERS IS
SAFE!



BUT THE CANNON SHELL THAT HAD HIT FLEMING'S LEG HAD EXPLODED UNDER HIS SEAT, AND TORN HIS CHUTE TO RIBBONS

THIS IS THE
END, FATHER, THE
END... I DID WHAT
I CAME TO DO...
I'VE NO REGRETS...
I'M NOT AFRAID!



Broken Wings

AND SO FLEMING'S WAR ENDED FOREVER. BUT PETERS, HIS NAVIGATOR, SURVIVED. WHEN HE HAD RECOVERED SUFFICIENTLY FROM HIS WOUNDS, HE WAS SENT TO A LUFTSTALAG ...

GOOD MORNING, GENTLEMEN.
I'M FLYING OFFICER PETERS,
LATE PATHFINDER AIRCREW!
I BOUGHT IT
OVER COLOGNE.

WE'RE ALL PRETTY OLD HANDS IN THIS HUT. I GOT MY LOT OVER THE ATLANTIC, BUT I HAD THE LUCK OF THE DEVIL! I GOT AWAY IN A LIFE RAFT, AND WAS PICKED UP BY A U-BOAT! THE NAME IS FLEMING -- SQUADRON LEADER FLEMING ...



PETERS LINGERED IN THE HUT, AND TALKED...

IT'S ODD, YOUR NAME BEING FLEMING! MY PILOT'S NAME WAS FLEMING -- THE GREATEST OPPO THAT EVER LIVED! HE BOUGHT IT OVER COLOGNE -- MUST HAVE SACRIFICED HIS LIFE TO GET ME OUT OF THE MOSSY, FOR I WAS OUT TO THE WORLD, AND COULDN'T HAVE OPENED MY OWN CHUTE. HE POSITIVELY HERO-WORSHIPPED HIS FATHER -- A FIRST WAR PILOT WHO WAS KILLED OVER THE ATLANTIC ON FERRY DUTIES ...



Broken Wings

WITH WHITE, SET FACE, THE SQUADRON LEADER HEARD THE STORY OF THE GREAT RAID ON COLOGNE ...

SO MY SON BECAME A PATHFINDER, TO PUT INTO ACTION WHAT HE BELIEVED I HAD CREATED ~ AND HE DIED OVER COLOGNE, CARRYING OUT HIS DUTY !

HE DID MORE THAN HIS DUTY, SIR ~ HE GOT ME OUT OF THAT MOSQUITO ALIVE, IN A SITUATION WHERE THE RULE IS 'EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF' !

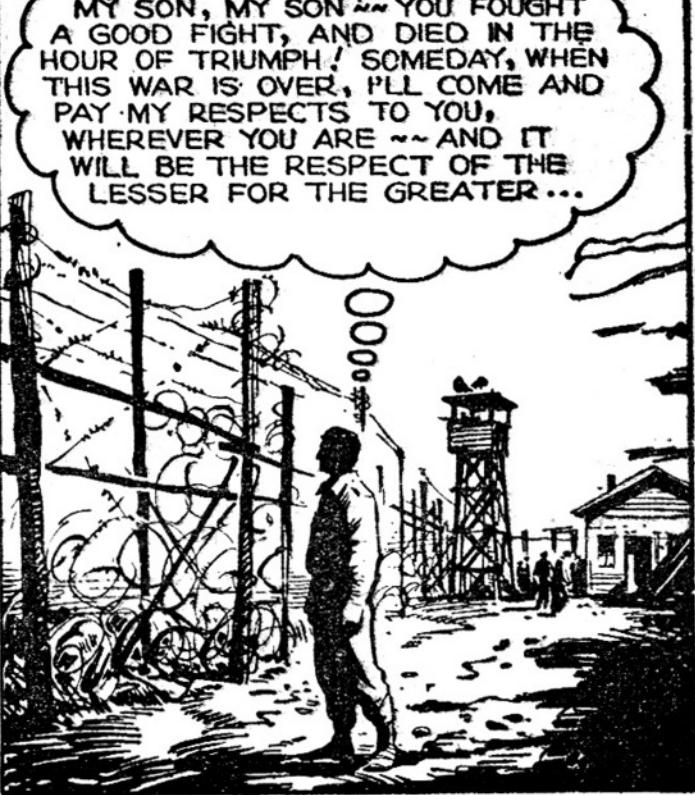


THEN PETERS EXPLAINED ABOUT THE ATLANTIC CONVOY EXPERIENCE, AND HOW FLEMING HAD TURNED OFF HIS FATHER'S DISTRESS CALL, NOT KNOWING WHO IT HAD BEEN ...

THAT WAS THE ONE THING THAT CUT HIM DEEPLY ~ THE FACT THAT **YOU** HAD ASKED HIM FOR HELP, AND HE HAD GONE AFTER A SUB. INSTEAD !

ABRUPTLY, SQUADRON LEADER FLEMING LEFT THE HUT. HE WALKED ACROSS THE STALAG COMPOUND TOWARDS THE WIRE, AND STOOD ALONE ...

MY SON, MY SON ~ YOU FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT, AND DIED IN THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH ! SOMEDAY, WHEN THIS WAR IS OVER, I'LL COME AND PAY MY RESPECTS TO YOU, WHEREVER YOU ARE ~ AND IT WILL BE THE RESPECT OF THE LESSER FOR THE GREATER ...



Broken Wings

AND SO IT WAS. FIVE YEARS LATER, WHEN THE WAR WAS PAST, AND A NEW EUROPE WAS EMERGING FROM THE RUBBLE, A MIDDLE-AGED MAN VISITED A WAR CEMETERY NEAR COLOGNE, AND STOOD FOR A WHILE IN SILENCE, AMONG THE FLOWERS AND THE PEACE ...

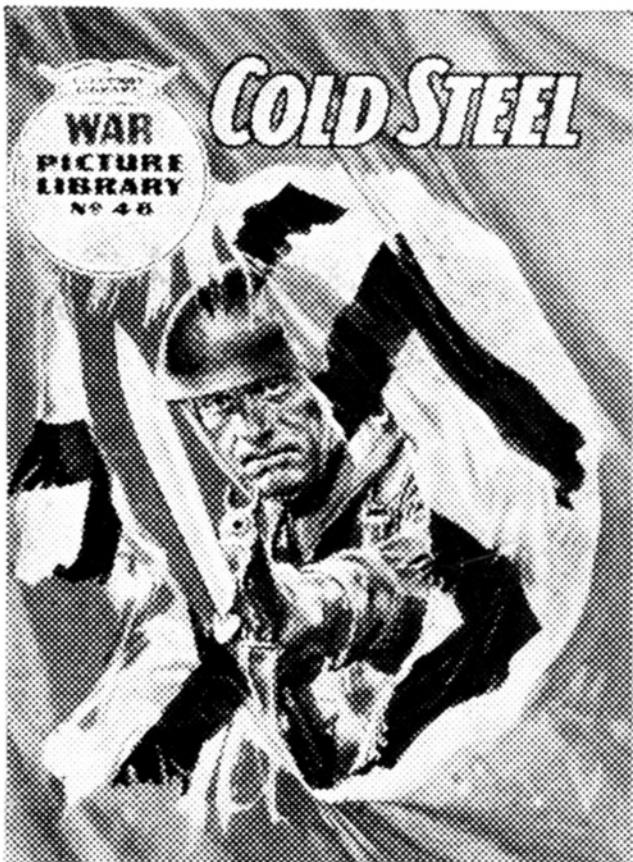


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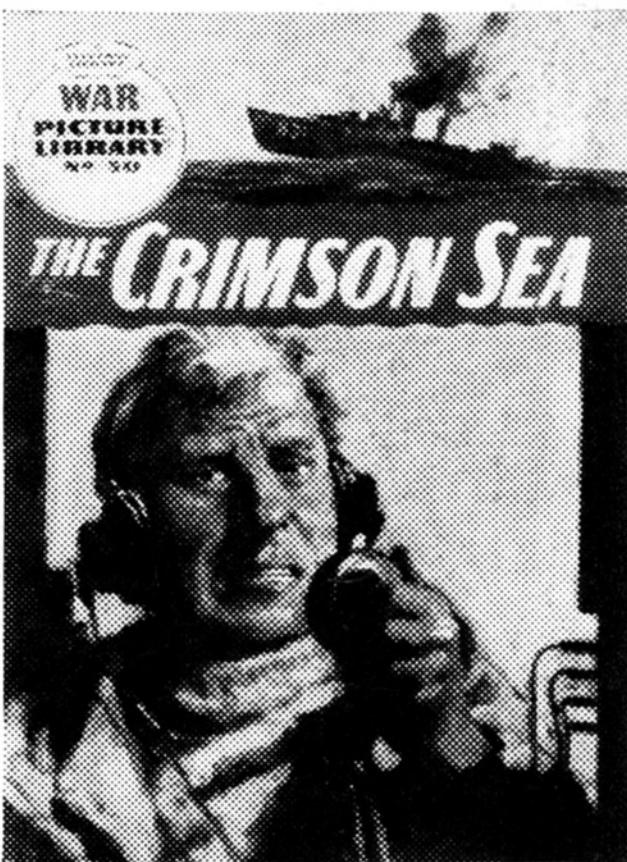
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